THE ASSESSMENT OF SOUTHERN GENTILITY

BY BRITISH TRAVELERS,

1776-1820

By

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Bachelor of Arts in History

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Kearney, NE

2009

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
July, 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Looking back, if I would have known the amount of hours, strength, and pure – and sometimes blind – determination that was required to complete this project, I do not believe I would have been so eager to pursue it. It was only through my academic network of advisors and mentors and the strong support system at school and home that I was able to accomplish what I have. To these people, I am eternally grateful.

It was in Dr. Richard Rohrs's class, the first semester of my masters program, that I was allowed to explore the presence of gentility in colonial North America. His interest in the topic encouraged me to look at the subject further. Dr. Rohrs's persistent guidance helped me in the best and worst times throughout the thesis process. I know that I was not the easiest student to advise, but I also know that this work would not be what it is today without his assistance. I could not have wished for a better thesis advisor; and for that, I thank him.

I continue to be amazed by the amount of knowledge that Dr. James Huston possesses on the Old South and the antebellum period, in general. His passion for history is an inspiration to me as I continue to pursue my own career in academia. It was also Dr. Huston who continued to challenge my view of southern culture and the reason it was the way it was. With the guidance of Dr. Huston, I was able to narrow my focus and really

get to the foundation of southern society. It was an honor to have him serve on my committee.

Dr. Jason Lavery's belief in the ability of his students remains unmatched. It was with the encouraging discussions with him that I was given the strength to stretch beyond my bounds and comforts and examine American gentility in a different light. His knowledge of European culture and society allowed for an international context that only years of historical research and passion could provide. Without this context, my views on southern society would not be complete.

Dr. Tonia Sharlach's assistance with my thesis defense came at a time of much stress and frustration on my part. I appreciate her ability to step in and read a thesis that is far outside of her specialization. Her critique was much needed and provided the fresh perspective that only she could have provided. To her, I am grateful.

While I am thankful to my committee for its academic support throughout this process, I am just as grateful for my colleagues-now-friends that were and are a part of the Oklahoma State graduate history program. Without them, I am confident my life would not have had the balance that was required to remain successful personally and academically. To Katie Skelton, Amanda Booth, and Jennifer Morrison, without your friendship and patience, I could not have done this. The many hours spent discussing our topics and your serving as sounding boards for my ideas and frustrations have left me indebted.

Finally, to my family, I cannot thank them enough. Though they did not always understand the reasons behind my frustrations that often dominated conversations over

the phone and in person, I could always rely on their emotional support and strength to bring me back upright. The faith of my father, the love of my mother, and the bravery and service of my brother have provided me with the examples I needed to become who I am today.

Without the guidance, love, and support of those closest to me, I would not have been able to complete this project. My only hope is that it reflects a fragment of the strength and intelligence that surround me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From its creation, the English colonies of North America had one characteristic that set them apart from England – an essentially egalitarian society. While England depended on a traditional aristocracy to hold the majority of social and political power, white, male emigrants to the New World had, more or less, equal opportunity to acquire the social and political power available in their colonial settlement.[1] The availability of cheap land allowed aspiring emigrants to rise in social distinction through their own means. Despite this egalitarian formation of the English colonies, by the eighteenth century, the wealthiest colonists turned to gentility, or the refined manners and characteristics of the English aristocracy, to legitimize their position at the top of their colonial societies.[2]

Gentility had a central role in the legitimizing process of the English aristocracy by the Renaissance period. During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, gentility was

[1] Norbert Elias, *Power and Civility*, vol. 2 of *The Civilizing Process*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 3.
[2] Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 36; Michal Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*: *Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 4.

defined as the characteristics and manners that determined an individual's position in the aristocracy. In England, these characteristics were categorized into two phases: personal development and the physical representation of refinement. In personal development, the genteel focused on birth, education, and wealth. English gentlemen turned to manners, dress, and fine possessions to legitimize their position among their peers. Where other classes of Englishmen spent the majority of their time earning income through manual labor, members of the aristocracy, who depended on other ways to acquire wealth, were able to spend the majority of their time developing and perfecting these characteristics of refinement. Social gatherings were one way for gentlemen to present their genteel manners and possessions. While these outward signs of refinement held sway in the legitimization of gentility, it was the personal development that held the most significance in the determination of one's social position among the genteel. By the eighteenth century, gentility still held this same role in English society.

It was during the 1700s that English colonists embraced certain characteristics of gentility. The psychology of why colonists were attracted to gentility remains undetermined. Regardless, the fact remains that English colonists adopted several traits of gentility during the eighteenth century. In terms of personal development, the first generation of colonists who turned to English gentility emphasized certain traits over others. Education through books, a certain degree of training in refined carriage and mannerisms, hospitality, horse breeding, and gambling activities were a few of the more popular genteel traits and activities adopted by the colonial elite. In other ways, the colonial elite suffered in matters of gentility. Such traits as hereditary birthright, wealth, fine possessions, and, in some places, education and genteel social activities, were found

wanting. The testimony of English travelers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries support all of these facts.

The English had long been infatuated with North America. Its geography and societal organization were completely different from what the English were accustomed to. The fact that the English were interested in North America while the colonies were still under English rule cannot be denied. Englishmen traveled to the colonies and sometimes even published their observations for public consumption. As soon as the colonists broke from the monarchy and developed a republican form of government, English curiosity rose significantly.[3]

The increase in publications of English travelogues on the United States is evidence of this increased curiosity. When Englishmen traveled to North America, many returned to England and published their experiences in the form of a diary, correspondence, or a narrative. As more Englishmen published these travelogues, they became a form of adventure genre in which the readers could imagine traveling to a distant land for which they did not have sufficient time or money to experience on their own.[4]

With the amount of foreign attention spent discussing American culture, by the mid-nineteenth century, Americans began publishing texts devoted to the subject of

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[3] Kathleen Burk, *Old World, New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2009), 278; Marion Tinling, Introduction to *With Women's Eyes: Visitors to the New World, 1775-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), ix; Thomas Hulme, Introduction to *A Year's Residence in the United States of America* by William Cobbett, ed. Thomas Hulme (1812; repr., Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 7; Allan Nevins, Preface to *America Through British Eyes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), v.

[4] Hulme, Introduction to *A Year's Residence in the United States of America*, 7-8.

foreign commentary. Henry T. Tuckerman was one of the first historians to devote time to this tradition with the publication of *America and Her Commentators* in 1864. Typical of nineteenth-century publications, Tuckerman provided his readership with a broad survey concerning authorship and discussions concerning the more important topics published in the travelogues. Tuckerman's text was exhaustive in geographical concern as well as nationalistic in his conclusions. While modern historians have not matched Tuckerman's research on this subject, his presentation of the authors and their publications does not represent a clear and unbiased interpretation. Regardless of these shortcomings, Tuckerman was a pioneer in recognizing the importance of studying foreigners' observations of the young United States. As he claimed, such a study allows historians to "trace physical and social development, normal and casual traits, through personal impressions."[5] With a more refined study, one can even consider the changing ideology of gentility and its implications as it transferred from the Old World to the New.

Three decades later, Stephen Brooks published *As Others See Us*, similar to Tuckerman's in organization and coverage of geography and literature. Unlike the traditional belief that the English "hated the United States," Brooks found that, "until after the Civil War [Americans] were not thought important enough to inspire that feeling."[6] Instead, the English simply looked down on Americans as unintelligent upstarts and, as a result, they tended to ignore the United States. Despite this initially unbiased reaction to the English travel publications, Brooks devoted one chapter almost exclusively to the attacks of Englishmen on Americans. Even with his focus on English

[5] Henry T. Tuckerman, *America and Her Commentators: With a Critical Sketch of Travel in the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1864), iii-iv.
[6] Stephen Brooks, *As Others See Us: The Causes and Consequences of Foreign Perceptions of America* (1908; repr., Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2006), 116.

commentary, Brooks tended to be nationalistic by minimizing the significance of English criticism of American culture.

By the mid-twentieth century, historians led by Allan Nevins, started to focus on a balanced interpretation of the commentary Englishmen offered on their travels in the United States. Nevins, in *America through British Eyes*, recognized that while Americans separated themselves from England politically in 1776, they "remained in distinct cultural dependence upon her."[7] This dependency on English culture lasted well into the nineteenth century and had a lasting impact on the planter society of the southern United States. Because of these revolutionary interpretations concerning America's social dependency on England, Nevins's compilation of important English travelogues led the way for historians to examine social changes from colonial development to the national period.

Besides historical publications concerning travelogues, during the mid-twentieth century, the study of southern society and gentility among the planter class reached its peak with the help of historians led by Louis B. Wright and William R. Taylor. It is only more recently with the publication of Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *Honor and Violence in the Old South* that gentility is discussed at length. Only at this point in the historiography of southern civilization did historians understand the necessity for examining the developing aristocratic tendencies among the planter class – such leanings essentially contradicted the egalitarian roots that English emigrants had established since the beginning of

[7] Allan Nevins, *America through British Eyes*, 3.

colonization in North America.[8] While all of these historians examined the rise of southern civilization and its relationship to its England, they did not utilize travelogues in their examinations.

Historians of the second half of the twentieth century have increasingly focused on the development of a refined southern society on the eastern seaboard. Historians such as Richard Bushman and Michal Rozbicki have developed Wyatt-Brown's interpretation of gentility further and even turned to a few travelogues and courtesy training manuals to support their interpretations.[9] While Bushman and Rozbicki, among other historians, have charted the way to understanding the degree to which gentility developed in the colonies, much work remains to be done in examining English travelogues for hints on how much of a hold these traditionally aristocratic tendencies had on the southern planter elite.

This study will show that – while English travelers recognized some traits of gentility among the southern planters of Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina – there were several ways in which these planters had not attained genteel standards. Chief among these characteristics of gentility that Americans lacked were heritage, sufficient wealth to sustain the lifestyle of the genteel year-round, and the availability of social gatherings and fine goods to support such a refined lifestyle. The

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[8] Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (1940; repr., Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1970); William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (1961; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790*-1860, 3rd Ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[9] Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America*; Michal Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman: Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America*.

examination of travelogues allows historians to define the characteristics of gentility that traveling Englishmen identified as existing in the South from 1776 to 1820. With this knowledge, it becomes clear that while the planter elite of these four southern states embraced several characteristics of gentility, English travelers did not view the southern planter as a form of aristocracy because they were missing key elements of gentility – namely, birth, wealth, exclusive right to refined manners, and the availability of fine possessions.

The assessment of English travelogues on the status of gentility in the South naturally has limitations – the first concerns the travelogues themselves. While the largest number of travelogues was published during the first half of the nineteenth century, not all of them fall under the scope of this study. For whatever reason, a lot of Britons did not travel to the southern states; or if they did, they did not publish their opinions on southern society. English travelers were interested in other aspects of North America culture. This included mapping the geography of various regions, local, regional, and national political institutions, the development of factories and other means of industry, and the situation of land and civilization on the western frontier. As a result, most of travelogues published between 1776 and 1820 were eliminated from this study. Despite this, the travelogues included in this analysis are substantial enough in content and description to represent British opinion of the extent of civility present in the South.

The second limitation concerns the definition of "the South." While tradition defines the South as synonymous with the Confederacy of the mid-nineteenth century, the geographical structure of the Early Republic had significantly more divisions. As historian Adam Rothman has established, there was a period of widespread migration to

and within the United States. Rothman states that between 1770 and 1820, "six new slave states joined the Union during the period." As slavery expanded, so too did the plantation lifestyle. But migration from the older regions of the South to the newer was not an instantaneous event. Rothman claims that a plantation society took thirty years to fully develop within these newly-founded states.[10] As a result, any account of gentility expressed in British travelogues from 1776 to 1820 would be an inaccurate depiction because the culture of these new states was not fully developed during this time. While Georgia existed before the American Revolution, its population doubled during the late eighteenth century. This huge increase in population allowed for its highest class to reach cultural maturity only during the 1820s.[11] Therefore, as with the new states, any foreign observations made on the merits of gentility in Georgia between 1776 and 1820 was not an accurate depiction because Georgia did not have a refined society until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It is for these reasons that this analysis focuses exclusively on the older plantation regions of the southern United States – namely, Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina.

To understand the degree that the American planter elite of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries could be classified as genteel by English standards, the English commentary on the subject must be examined. To set the foundation for such a study, chapter two will examine the development of class and gentility in England. It will also examine the transfer of refined civilization from England to the southern colonies of British North America. This will provide the necessary background and terminology

[10] Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), x.
[11] Rothman, *Slave Country*, 10.

needed to examine British commentary during the early national period. English travelers from the late-eighteenth century found a southern elite society that possessed some of the physical representations of refinement that were crucial to established English gentility. However, they also found a few faults with the "refined" southern planters. Chapter three will examine these assessments by English travelers from 1776 to 1800. Nineteenth-century English travelers, as examined in the fourth chapter, found a southern elite that valued different means to social and political advancement; they also discovered major inconsistencies with the seemingly lavish lifestyle that the southern planters exhibited in front of their peers. These criticisms found in nineteenth-century English travelogues point to the central issues at the foundation of gentility and its existence in the southern United States, which will be discussed at length in the concluding chapter of this study.

CHAPTER II

OLD WORLD TRADITIONS AND NEW WORLD IMPLEMENTATIONS

When British colonists reached the stage of colonial development in which they focused less on individual survival and more on societal stratification, they did not start from nothing; they relied on the organization of society in England as an example. With the colonists' attempt to transfer the social hierarchy of the English gentry to their frontier, they also adopted the characteristics of gentility, the social characteristics of the established English gentlemen. This same gentility dominated the southern United States from the Revolutionary War to at least 1820; it also influenced much of the societal concerns of British travelers with regard to the status of civilization in the southern United States. In essence, the British travelers assessed characteristics of gentility in the process of determining the merits of American society. This chapter will trace the establishment of gentility in Europe and its transfer to the American colonies in the early eighteenth century. By doing so, the characteristics of gentility adopted by the American colonies and maintained by the southern United States will be clearly defined before chapters three and four examine the specific concerns of British travelers related to gentility.

The culture that developed in the American colonies during the first half of the 1800s affected every part of society in the second half of the century. With a genteel education, colonists gained an understanding of social stratification. Gentlemen-planters were taught their proper role in relation to the merchant and labor classes; this directly influenced the internal and external economy of the colonies as they developed into a country of their own. The stratification of society had an impact on race and gender relations in the form of a patriarchy and the separation of public and private spheres. Finally, the ideals adopted by the genteel class of the American colonies affected their social and political relationship with Europe, at large, and England, specifically.[12] As a result, the American social hybrid of English gentility had a critical role in the development of the United States. The evolution of this social standard – as constructed by the country gentlemen of England – and its importance in society illustrates its direct effect on the establishment of the wealthy planter class.

At the basic level, English society was divided into three classes under the king. The nobility was at the top. This class consisted of dukes, marquises, and earls who were members by birth.[13] In 1611, the king invented the baronetcy to fill the void between the nobility and gentry. While this title was noble, its position in society was below the noble peers and above the knights of the gentry. The English gentry were defined as all

[12] Michal Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman: Cultural Legitimacy in Plantation America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 3.
[13] Chris Givens-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: The Fourteenth-Century Political Community* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 55.

landholders between the nobility and above the yeomanry. This class included all knights, esquires, and gentlemen without title.[14]

To simplify the organization of English society, modern historians have categorized four levels of distinction among the gentry.[15] The greater gentry included knights with income in excess of £1000 per annum (*pa*). Knights with incomes between £250 *pa* and £1000 *pa* made up the lesser gentry. The country gentleman of the eighteenth century included poorer knights and richer esquires with incomes generally around £250 *pa.* The last level of the gentry, the parish gentry, consisted of the lesser landholders: poorer esquires, gentlemen without title, wealthy lawyers and merchants who had invested in land and acquired country seats, and even some of the richer yeomen. The bottom of this class faded into the yeomanry with no clear division point between the two.[16] This modern organization of the English gentry clarifies the position in society that the British colonies were aspiring to become. The position and sway that the country gentlemen held in English politics and society during the seventeenth century naturally appealed to the wealthiest colonists who wanted the same power in their own society.

The English country gentleman provided the political sway in their local shires and, later, had influence in national politics.[17] By 1350, the country gentlemen filled political positions including that of sheriff, justice of the peace, and even parliamentary

[14] Maurice Ashley, *England in the Seventeenth Century,* third ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), 17.
[15] Ibid., 17; Givens-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages,* 69.
[16] Givens-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages,* 69-70.
[17] Ibid., 74.

seats.[18] Once the country gentry held a majority in the House of Commons in the sixteenth century, it became stronger, larger, and more politically influential. According to historian Maurice Ashley, it also became "the centre of influence, fashion, and education."[19] In essence, the country gentleman held the ability to manipulate these traits in society. When the colonists turned to gentility to define their social stratification, it was this third level of gentry, the country gentleman, for which they turned for a model.[20]

The origin of the term "gentleman" dates from before 1200 with the merging of "gentle" and "man" and signified a "well-born man."[21] In seventeenth-century England, the term "gentleman" had become a reference to a man of certain social standing; not every man had the qualifications or means to be considered a gentleman. According to historian J. R. Jones, gentlemen were traditionally only classified as such if the heralds issued them a coat of arms. These heralds would require an "authentic gentle birth, and an absolute separation for at least three generations from the degrading pursuit of trade, industry, or usury."[22] In a courtesy book first published in the seventeenth century, the author dedicated an entire chapter to the discussion of coats of arms and their position in high society. On the link between the merit of a gentleman and his physical possession of coats of arms, the author wrote, "how should we give Nobilitie her true value, respect, and title, without notice of her Merit: and how may we guess her merit, without these

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[18] Ibid., 73.
[19] Ashley, *England in the Seventeenth Century*, 20.
[20] William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (1961; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), xv; Stow Persons, *The Decline of American Gentility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), vi.
[21] Robert K. Barnhart and Sol Steinmetz, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (Edinburgh: H. W. Wilson, 1988), s.v. "Gentle."
[22] J. R. Jones, *Country and Court: England, 1658-1714* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 86.

outward ensigns and badges of Vertue."[23] While this tradition still held sway into the eighteenth century, extra-societal changes allowed a few men to become labeled a gentleman if he could "pass himself off as one" – though most of the higher classes did not advocate this practice.[24]

In England, society standards restricted the nobility and the yeomanry from participating in the activities of the gentry; but specific ranks within the gentry were able to socialize among one another without stigma.[25] As a result of this social freedom, there was a diversity of contemporary opinion as to the appropriate lifestyle of the 1600s.[26] Some gentlemen preferred to define their gentlemanliness by their ability to have time for play and pleasure.[27] Other gentlemen prescribed to the saying that "idleness was the nurse of all evil" and spent the majority of their time handling the affairs, management, and accounts of their estate as well as other activities (e.g. horse breeding). Some even volunteered their time to organizing and participating in community activities and movements.[28]

By the seventeenth century, events – including the English Civil War, the development of the colonies, as well as economic expansion and diversity – produced a

[23] Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London: Francis Constable, 1625), 138. *Early English Books Online*, eebo.chadwyck.com.argo.library.okstate.edu/ (Accessed March 28, 2011).
[24] Jones, *Country and Court*, 86.
[25] Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999),18.
[26] Ashley, *England in the Seventeenth Century*, 18.
[27] Ibid., 18-19.
[28] Ibid.

remarkable increase in social mobility.[29] This consumer revolution affected the social structure of the period. Members of the lower classes gained more wealth and influence. This reallocation of wealth among classes during the consumer revolution allowed the formation of a new social class; the "monied interest" was stationed between the parish gentry and yeomanry.[30] Despite the growing influence of the monied interest, the country gentry still claimed, by English tradition, political and social dominance. Growing discrepancies between these two classes as a result of the economic upheaval led to a crisis of identity among the traditional gentry.[31] Though the lower classes never actually took over the power and influence possessed by the provincial gentlemen during the seventeenth century, historian J. R. Jones argues that these gentlemen realized that, "while they were finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their standards in life, there were favoured sections of society whose wealth and influence were improving to the point where, it was believed, they would be able to supersede the gentry."[32]

Despite opposition by the traditional country gentry, by the eighteenth century, money held more influence with social status than did the traditional emphasis on birth and hereditary station, and the wealthiest of the English middle class were absorbing qualities of gentility into their lifestyle.[33] Historian Michal J. Rozbicki rightly emphasizes the fact that while the British colonists did not have the hereditary claim to English

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[29] Karin Calvert, "The Function of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 257.
[30] Jones, *Country and Court,* 73.
[31] Ibid.,71, 82; Calvert, "The Function of Fashion," 257.
[32] Jones, *Country and Court,* 71.
[33] Ibid., 79; Bushman, *The Refinement of America,* 36.

gentility, their case was also not the first in which new classes sought social mobility and confirmation. The British model for which colonists turned was not stable.[34]

According to historians Robert Olwell and Alan Tully, there were three phases of colonization. During the first phase, initial settlement, immigrants struggled with their ideals and accustomed mentalities that contrasted with the realities of a new land.[35] Participants of this phase in the British colonies were usually younger sons of merchant families with a commercial background and mentality.[36] Luxury items that were present in the New World were usually limited and brought over from England by rich immigrants.[37] During the second phase of colonization, colonists shed Old World habits and were willing to learn from the new land and its inhabitants.[38] In the 1660s, there was still not a clear social distinction among the settlers.[39] Once they were able to establish a basic livelihood in the New World, they were able to focus on a small amount of items of

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[34] Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 5.
[35] Robert Olwell and Alan Tully, Introduction to *Cultures and Identities in Colonial British America*, ed. Robert Olwell and Alan Tully (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 15.
[36] Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 26. Rozbicki contends this fact. When the fact that younger sons of merchant families were the first to settle regions in the southern colonies is juxtaposed with the late-seventeenth century adoption of an inherently anti-commercial social model, gentility, by sons of these settlers, "one must address the fact that since the immigrant leaders had mostly commercial and city backgrounds, they already carried a powerful cultural stigma – exclusion from gentility – that needed to be overcome. One may be skeptical whether it was being defeated by embracing both the genteel and commercial ethos, when the latter was the very source of such a stigma." See, Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 26-27.
[37] Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 62.
[38] Olwell and Tully, Introduction to *Cultures and Identities*, 11-15.
[39] Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior," 65.

comfort to supplement necessities.[40] At this point, the wealthiest colonists were able to have more items of comfort; for example, they were able to enjoy work after dark with the convenience of candles, and were able to afford mirrors as well as better and more dish and cookware, beds, and linens.[41] By the third phase in colonization, settlers attempted to improve themselves (and their societies) through civilization.[42] By the mid-1680s, changes in social conduct began to occur at the top of colonial society. Within twenty years, European travellers could distinguish the wealthiest colonists from other colonists.[43] Research by historians Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh show that – despite this evident beginning to social stratification – colonial estates in excess of £490 annual income usually possessed only one or two luxuries by the turn of the eighteenth century.[44] Even as late as 1715, plain living was still prevalent among the highest of society in the British colonies.[45] Until after 1725, the rich had acquired more comfort than most, but their social conditions were still not clear by English standards. Visitors to the colonies before this point were unable to distinguish social standards by existing colonial lifestyles.[46] Regardless of standards to this point, historians have found proof that wealthy colonists had begun to turn to a British model of civility as a guide for their

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[40] Ibid., 62.
[41] Ibid., 63.
[42] Olwell and Tully, Introduction to *Cultures and Identities,* 11-15.
[43] Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior," 61-65. For a discussion of the impact of diversification in the colonies, see, Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 118, 120.
[44] Ibid., 65. Also see a similar discussion in Kevin M. Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 3.
[45] Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 64. This pre-modern social and material condition was present in England among the lesser, country and parish gentry. See Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 64.
[46] Ibid., 63.

own.[47] These changes in possessions and actions became defined during the eighteenth century.[48]

With the consumer revolution, new English manufacturing methods and transportation networks paved the way for more consumer market efficiencies. These efficiencies allowed prices to drop and a variety of goods to become available to a larger consumer group. These changes reached the British colonies by the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Historians have turned to this as a partial explanation for the change that affected the wealthy colonists.[49] By the 1740s, sons of the local Chesapeake gentry who traveled to England and Europe for their education learned of contemporary metropolitan trends and prices. This knowledge began to spread across the colonies and merchants had to accommodate consumers who were more informed than ever before.[50] Naturally, as social hierarchy became more of a concern, the wealthy needed a way to train the next generation in the ways of gentility; courtesy books assisted in this.

Colonists learned the requirements of gentility in several ways. At the basic level, sumptuary legislation defined the emulation of social status by restricting possession of certain stylistic objects to specific class ranks.[51] Laws assisted in clarifying what was

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[47] Olwell and Tully, Introduction to *Cultures and Identities,*11-15.
[48] Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 60.
[49] Ibid., 66, 105.
[50] Ibid., 109. This included beginning shipments to and publications of British courtesy books in the colonies. See Olwell and Tully, "Introduction to *Cultures and Identities*, 11-15.
[51] Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman,* 25. Sumptuary laws originated in Europe and for the previous four centuries, it was often the government's attempt to legislate social status. According to historian Karin Calvert, "each time the attempt failed" and "only within controlled and closed institutions where there is a precise and fixed system of rank – the church or the military, for example – have sumptuary laws proved effective." See Calvert, "The Function of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America," 258.

expected of its settlers. As historian Arthur M. Schlesinger has pointed out, a minority of men who were already that the top of society passed these laws. These men published laws that fit their idea of the way society should be organized – whether or not that ideal matched that of the Mother Country. Either way, this form of management only covered the most rudimentary aspects of society such as polite dress for each class.[52]

Where these laws left off, publications (such as almanacs, books, and periodicals) assisted in the public opinion of social behavior. Periodicals such as *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* as well as popular novels (including Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, Clarissa,* and *Sir Charles Grandison*) included instructions on how to behave in a genteel manner.[53] These forms of publications were extremely popular in the colonies; for example, American publishers published at least thirty editions of Richardson's three novels combined.[54] *The Polite Academy,* published during the eighteenth century, included a cautionary tale borrowed from the French, "Beauty and the Beast." Beauty, the heroine of the story, was a representation of what the higher classes of European society considered ideal behavior. Not only was she studious, but she also looked after her father and the rest of the household when her sisters were not willing to. In fact, to save her father from death at the hands of the Beast, Beauty sacrificed her own future. By doing so, Beauty chose virtue over wit and attractiveness and received all three attributes in return for such a sacrifice. Her sisters, on the other hand, exemplified pride, anger, gluttony, and idleness; their maliciousness and enviousness were their worst vices and the

[52] Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Learning How to Behave: A Historical Study of American Etiquette Books* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 1-4.
[53] Bushman, *The Refinement of America,* 36.
[54] Ibid., 85.

reason why the witch punished them by turning them into statues.[55] Though critical to the process of gentrification, these two modes of teaching – laws and publications – however, only reached adults after the majority of their education was complete.[56]

The education of children in the southern colonies, as in England, began with a reliance on their parents to set a proper example of how to behave.[57] Naturally, parents supplied the first examples of behavior and virtue as their children were just beginning the learning process. As children grew older, parents remained the primary source of values. Unfortunately, England was behind the rest of Europe when it came to supplying the proper example for its youth, according to contemporary courtesy author, Henry Peacham. He attributed this backwardness to the "remisnesse of Parents, and negligence of Masters in their youth."[58] Regardless of Peacham's estimation of English parental guidance, there were exemplary Englishmen whose parenting served as a model for future generations of parents to follow.

Lord Chesterfield was one of the few parents Peacham would not have addressed; Chesterfield provided an exceptional model for the gentlemanly aspirations he expected of his son. After sending his son to Europe and hiring a private tutor and dancing master to teach gentlemanly manners and education to his son, Chesterfield consistently wrote letters requesting updates on his son's achievements and always providing helpful advice

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[55] *The Polite Academy, or school of behaviour for young gentlemen and ladies. Intended as a foundation for good manners and polite address, in masters and misses,* 9th ed. (London: R. R. Baldwin, 1780?), 126-127. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online,* http://find.galegroup.com.argo.library.okstate.edu/ (Accessed March 28, 2011).
[56] Schlesinger, *Learning How to Behave,* 1-4. The only exception is courtesy books, which, for the most part, were written for a young audience.
[57] Ibid.; Bushman, *The Refinement of America,* 31.
[58] Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman,* "To the Reader."

and anecdotes.[59] According to the preface of the 1901 edition of Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son,* Chesterfield's ideal for gentlemanly status was the result of strict practice mastering the art of genteel character and presentation.[60]Lord Chesterfield did not skimp on lectures and anecdotes to assist his son in obtaining this ideal. Later, Chesterfield's correspondence was published as a form of guidebook on behavior for other Englishmen and colonists.

Courtesy books served as a supplement to parental lessons. These texts gave children and aspiring gentlemen lessons and anecdotes to learn the preferred behavior of their society.[61] In England, according to historian Richard Bushman, courtesy books were "published for the country gentlemen, merchants, professionals in provincial towns, and many others with no access to court."[62] Editions of European, and, especially, English, courtesy books were often imported and published in the colonies. Historian Hunter Dickinson Farish goes so far as to claim that, in the colonies, English courtesy books were "on every gentleman's shelves."[63] While it can be maintained that the first immigrants to North America only brought the necessities, historians have found that books (including the courtesy genre) were often included among these necessities. From

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[59] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion," 271.
[60] Oliver H. G. Leigh, Preface to *Letters to His Son: On the Fine Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman*, by Philip Dormer Stanhope, Fifth Earl of Chesterfield, ed. Oliver H. G. Leigh, 2 vols. (Washington D. C.: M. Walter Dunne, 1901) 1: x. Leigh ascribes Lord Chesterfield as being "a model of gentility." See Leigh, Preface to *Letters to His Son,* x.
[61] Bushman, *The Refinement of America,* 31.
[62] Ibid., 36. It was at court that gentlemen traditionally learned genteel manners. By the publication of courtesy books, the lower gentry were able to gain previously prohibited access to gentility. See Bushman, *The Refinement of America,* 36.
[63] Hunter Dickinson Farish, introduction to the second edition of *Journals and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion,* by Philip Vickers Fithian, ed. Hunter Dickinson Farish (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1957), xvii-xviii.

this, it can be deduced that owners prized these books for their value in teaching essential lessons.[64] Only the wealthiest planters could afford the cost of importation; as a result, historian Michal Rozbicki claims that "the great planters, especially in Virginia, probably came closer to the lifestyle of English landed gentry than any other group in British colonial America."[65]

The establishment of gentility on both sides of the Atlantic had two phases: physical representation and inner-virtue. Material possessions were key to the first phase. According to historian Karin Calvert, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, gentlemen earned their gentlemanly status first by visual statements of gentility through material possessions. These possessions manifested themselves in the form of general wealth, fashionable clothing, and greatness of house.[66] This stress on material possessions affected the British colonists by the 1710s and 1720s. As a result of the consumer revolution, lower prices and improved transportation capabilities allowed physical possessions, specifically imported goods, to have a critical role in the process of colonial gentrification.[67]

Scholars have marked the beginning of these characteristics of gentility with monetary wealth. Families who tended to be wealthy owned several servants or slaves; historians Carr and Walsh argue that the ownership of more slaves provided more income

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[64] Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (1940; repr., Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1970), 117; Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 32.
[65] Bushman, *The Refinement of America,* 32; Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia,* 117-118; Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 2.
[66] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion in the Eighteenth-Century America," 254.
[67] Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 61-62.

and eventually resulted in a further established wealth and comfort.[68] Naturally, the majority of the colonial second generation was allowed an inheritance in some form because their parents could afford to pass on possessions by this point of colonial development. This freed time and energy to focus more on luxurious consumption. Just as the wealthy colonists looked up to the country gentleman in England for a model of gentility, so the middling planters did with the more wealthy planters.[69]

Colonists had differing opinions on proper symbols of wealth. William Byrd II of Virginia led a very ostentatious lifestyle, so much so that, by 1776, he was £100,000 sterling in debt. Charles Carroll of Maryland, on the other hand, took a different approach. He had a fortune worth £100,000 sterling, but did not spend it on finery. He believed that his first obligation was to provide for the next generation and the best way to do so was not through purchasing fine possessions.[70] By 1800, American gentlemen took a more subtle approach at showing gentility than Byrd. They focused more on refinement and control than excess of fine goods. Leisure time became crucial for the gentleman as it was during this time that he could focus on the elegance of this new style of gentility. Those who could not afford such leisure time fell behind on the social ladder because they could not learn and practice the intricate behaviors and styles of the genteel.[71]

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[68] Ibid., 118, 123.
[69] Ibid., 66, 104-105.
[70] Ronald Hoffman, Preface to *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), xi.
[71] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America," 260. Calvert fails to distinguish whether these changes of opinion were transcendent of or restricted to

By the 1760s, comfort and the use of goods to advertise social status were not only for the wealthy. To a certain degree, many middling households and a few poorer ones took part in the consumer revolution and developed colonial ideals of gentility. Just as the wealthy colonists looked up to the country gentlemen in England for examples of gentility, the middling planters did the same with the more wealthy planters.[72] Still, during this time, focus on imported finery held a secondary role in the lives of the middling planters; they were not far enough along in development to focus primarily on the importation of personal goods for social advancement.[73]

As time passed and the middling planters were eventually able to pick up more European trends and goods, for the wealthiest, characteristics of gentility focused more on manner and less emphasis was placed on material possessions.[74] By 1770, fashions in clothing, furnishings, and architecture were simplified and design was not as flamboyant as before.[75] This trend continued until the end of the eighteenth century when silks, satins, bright colors, pastels, lace, and jewelry all became almost exclusive to the fashion of women.[76]

In Western tradition, costume has provided a "fairly precise visual code," according to Calvert, for "communicating such useful information as the wearer's gender, marital status, age, military rank, religious or political office, occupation, and social

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geographical regions. Perhaps the North had more of a restrictive view on flamboyant styles than the South.

[72] Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 66, 104-105.

[73] Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 34.

[74] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion," 274; Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 67.

[75] Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 48-49.

[76] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion," 275.

position."[77] The first immigrants to the New World brought this "visual code" with them. Throughout the seventeenth century, clothing continued to define the social stratification of settlers on a basic level.[78] Gold or silver hatbands, girdles, buckles, brooches, and finger rings were popular as signs of higher social status. Wealthier men would also curl and perfume their own, long hair as a sign of social status. However, by the 1720s, gentlemen began to shave their hair in preference to wigs as a representation of wealth and social standing.[79] During this period, the wealthiest colonists donned "gold and silver lace, knots and roses of silk ribbon, intricately embroidered velvets, slashed sleeves, and gold and silver rings, chains, and buttons" to assist in their representation of gentility. Many gentlemen recognized that the gold and silver and lace were only the beginning of showing genteel fashion sense.[80]

Lord Chesterfield placed less emphasis on clothes. In a letter to his son, he said, "you must dress; therefore attend to it; not in order to rival or to excel a fop on it, but in order to avoid singularity, and consequently ridicule."[81] Fine dress was used as a tool for fitting into proper society and avoiding standing out in a crowd – a natural threat to social distinction and eminence. Chesterfield attributed dress as a supplement to manners; it was

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[77] Ibid., 252-253.
[78] This argument, presented by Calvert, implies that following European tradition concerning social emulation was not a new development to the eighteenth century. Changes in colonial conduct began at the ability of wealthier colonists to follow the social standards of the *country gentry* class as a higher standard than what they were used to.
[79] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion," 255, 263.
[80] Ibid., 255. It is important to note, as Calvert has point out, the genteel class in the colonies and abroad had the natural right of superiority and power. This natural right allowed them the freedom to "deliberately transgress the rules of dress that bound lesser man." Calvert, "The Function of Fashion," 277.
[81] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter I, October 9, 1746, 2-3; Letter VIII, April 3, 1747, 13.

the visual verification of gentility that had to be confirmed by good manners. In another letter, he expressed joy that his son had acquired the fine dress of a gentleman: "If I am rightly informed, I am now writing to a fine gentleman, in a scarlet coat laced with gold, a brocade waistcoat, and all other suitable ornaments."[82] Chesterfield then expressed his wish that these fine clothes were not to be the limit of his son's refinement; Chesterfield required the learning of a gentleman as support to his son's gentlemanliness.[83] According to Chesterfield's advise, clothes were definitely a – but not the only – requirement to possessing gentility.

In the colonies, houses became the best form of physical representation of social status. Before 1700, colonial houses resembled late medieval architecture. This form was the common trend in England for buildings other than the grandest palaces and mansions of the English nobility and greater gentry.[84] According to Richard Guy Wilson, the majority of houses in colonial Virginia only had one or two rooms.[85] By the 1720s, 80 percent of the wealthiest Virginians' houses consisted of two rooms and one-and-a-half floors.[86] In the early eighteenth century, however, the Renaissance-inspired Georgian style from England began to make an appearance on the eastern seaboard.[87] This style

[82] Ibid., Letter VIII, April 3, 1747, 13.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 103.
[85] Richard Guy Wilson, Introduction to *Historic Houses of Virginia: Great Plantation Houses, Mansions, and Country Places*, by Kathryn Masson (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2006), 16.
[86] Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 4.
[87] McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses,* 103.

remained popular among the wealthy in British North America until the end of the colonial period.[88]

In the mid-eighteenth century, there was a remarkable change in the style of colonial houses. Wealthy southern planters began using their profits to build larger houses as a sign of their wealth and sophistication. After 1750, an increase in imported pattern books and immigrant architects allowed the wealthiest colonists to follow the Georgian style of house-building more closely than ever before.[89] By the 1770s, imported goods began to add to interiors, marking houses as genteel. This included floor coverings, wallpapers, carriages, and mahogany furniture. This period of architectural development, historians argue, marked the first signs of a truly American landed elite.[90]

The Neo-Classical Style became popular in England during the 1760s and 1770s. It translated into the Federal style in the United States in the 1780s and 1790s. Historian Kevin Sweeney argues that this style was an "obvious mode of those Americans who sought to communicate status and wealth with an understated style." It emphasized simplicity of design with a lack of detail and less carving.[91] This shift to a simpler architectural design is an example of the shift in genteel trends to simpler design. Also, by this point, genteel trends had established into a social standard among the wealthy colonial planters.

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[88] Ibid., 103.
[89] Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 11, 39; Wilson, Introduction to *Historic Houses of Virginia*, 18.
[90] Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 11, 37-38.
[91] Ibid., 48-49, 50-51.

The political unrest of the Revolutionary War could not damage the progress of this genteel culture in the southern colonies.[92] A few contemporary Americans believed that favoritism of the English genteel model was a threat to their national ideology and attacked the persistence of any further English social influence on the former colonies.[93] Despite this critical assessment by a few, Old World architectural practices inspired American building techniques long after the Revolutionary War.[94] At the turn of the nineteenth century, Americans followed the English examples of Neo-Classical style more closely.[95] This rise in genteel architecture assisted the development of social stratification beginning in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and persisting into the nineteenth.[96]

With the transition to a simpler design during the second half of the eighteenth century, gentility was judged just as much on *how* a man fashioned himself and his surroundings as *what* he owned. Inner virtue became a second phase of establishing gentility. Gentlemen focused more on the ease and grace of wearing clothes and taking part in social activities. As an example, Lord Chesterfield consistently placed more

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[92] Ibid., 58.
[93] Ibid., 54. While Kevin M. Sweeney and William Morgan make the argument that the social development of gentility was not interrupted by the Revolution despite critical attempts to link elite tastes to Patriot aspirations, Michal Rozbicki argues that concepts of gentility already established in America were given a new democratic meaning with the political turmoil of the 1760s and 1770s. See Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 54; William Morgan, *The Abrams Guide to American House Styles*, ed. by Richard Olsen (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 61; and Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 3.
[94] McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 103.
[95] Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 54.
[96] Edward A. Chappell, "Housing a Nation: The Transformation of Living Standards in Early America" in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 232.

emphasis on display. He stressed that while the physical belongings were simply external displays of gentility, it was the ease and grace of a gentleman that proved that gentility went beyond the exterior.[97]

Leisure time was not defined as it is today. In the eighteenth century, less emphasis was placed on the fact that leisure was freedom from the demands of the day, and more on using leisure time for personal development and advancement in society. Leisure time allowed gentlemen to learn and modify ease and grace.[98] For, as Lord Chesterfield reminded his son on numerous occasions, "in truth, whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well; and nothing can be done well without attention."[99] To accomplish this, Chesterfield advised his son to "employ [his] whole time, which few people do" and "put every moment to profit of some kind or other."[100] Chesterfield included being in company, walking, and riding as activities that could be accomplished in leisure time. He did not have patience, however, for people who spent time doing nothing. He provided this anecdote to illustrate the benefit of employing as much time as possible to personal development:

> I knew a gentleman, who was so good a manager of his time, that he would not even lose that small portion of it, which the calls of nature obliged him to pass in the necessary-house; but gradually went through all the Latin poets, in those moments. He bought, for example, a common edition of Horace, of which he tore off gradually a couple of pages, carried them with him to that necessary place, read them first, and then sent them down as a sacrifice to Cloacina; this was so much time fairly gained; and I recommend you to follow his example. It is better than only doing what

[97] Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 144-145.
[98] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion," 270.
[99] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son*, Letter XXI, July 20, 1747, 37.
[100] Ibid., Letter IV, December 9, 1746, 7.

> you cannot help doing at those moments; and it would made any book, which you shall read in that manner, very present in your mind.[101]

Personal moments were not the only time a gentleman could advance his culture and education. According to Chesterfield, leisure activities such as "public spectacles, assemblies of good company, cheerful suppers, and even balls" were useful as a means of personal development.[102] During these social gatherings, the faithful gentleman spent his time paying attention to his surroundings, watching the behavior of the characters in his company, and listened intently to the topics being discussed. Occasions where gentlemen ate, drank, played cards, and held conversation offered opportunities for them to prove their civility through genteel dress and manners.[103]

The middle of the eighteenth century, however, was a time for change in social rituals. Genteel activity required the art of appearing impulsive and casual that only learning and practice during leisure time would provide.[104] Through this process of presentation and refinement, those who were recognized as naturally genteel were set apart from the aspiring gentlemen. These aspiring gentlemen of the lower class were at a disadvantage; their social standing and economic position did not allow them sufficient leisure time to polish these traits of gentility.[105] Evidence in this lack of preparation showed at social gatherings when gentlemen measured gentility.

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[101] Ibid., Letter XXI, July 20, 1747, 37.
[102] Ibid., XVIII, October 30, 1747, 31-32.
[103] Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular," 7; Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 131.
[104] Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 131. Fashion and furnishings reinforced these activities. See Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 131].
[105] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion," 270, 275.

According to the lessons of the day, social gatherings were always to be held in good company. To make this point, Henry Brathwaite published his version of a classic story in a popular courtesy book of the eighteenth century. The story was about a young man who, despite his genteel education, fell into bad company and became the leader of a gang of thieves. As a result, this young man lost his promising future. This story warned about the necessity for children to always remain in good company. By presenting this anecdote, Brathwaite asserted that children were more susceptible to immoral activity due to their naivety. The story also emphasized the influence that society had on the weak. It was, to draw on a previous argument on parenting by Henry Peacham, the role of the parent to control their child's environment so he did not fall into the same social deceptions as the young man in the story.[106]

Richard Brathwaite and Lord Chesterfield reminded their readers that the most accurate judge of a man's worth was seen in his acquaintances. Lord Chesterfield also cautioned his son to always hold company with those who were above him in merit. Low company consisted of pettiness in men who would, just by association, draw out and influence the negative character traits of the most upmost-standing men in society. Chesterfield claimed that by deserving good company, a man could always be in it.

[106] Henry Brathwaite, *The English Gentleman; and the English Gentlewoman*, 3rd ed. (London: John Dawson, 1641), 2-3. *Early English Books Online*. http://eebo.chadwyck.com/ (Accessed on March 30, 2011); Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman,* 3.

Gentlemen earned good company through their own merit and good breeding.[107] Once in good company, a gentleman held it through his behavior and manners.[108]

Authors of two popular colonial courtesy books, *The School of Good Behavior* and *The Polite Academy* offered advice to the genteel class on how to behave when in good company. They were not to sing or hum, were to stand steady and upright, when they had to cough or sneeze, they were to do it with as little noise as possible; when they sat, they were expected to do so in a "genteel and easy posture." When in company, reading and writing were prohibited. The genteel were also to remain "moderately cheerful, neither Laughing nor Frowning;" but if they could not help but laugh, it was to be done by simply smiling. "Nothing shews a genteel person more than laughing decently," according to *The Polite Academy.*[109]

Gentlemen were also to pay close attention to conversation according to the majority of contemporary courtesy books. Richard Brathwaite warned his readers that "*Gentlemen,* of all others, ought to be most respective of their conversation; for a little soile is a great blemish in them, whose *Education* promiseth more than inferior men." When conducting a conversation with another, *The Polite Academy* reminded gentlemen to say as little as possible and when they did speak they were to "be gentle in all [their] words." As a result, everyone would wish to be in his or her company. This included, according to *The School of Good Manners,* speaking clearly without pause or stutter and

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[107] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter XV, October 2, 1747, 25; Brathwaite, *The English Gentleman,* 30.
[108] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter XV, October 2, 1747, 25.
[109] Eleazor Moody, *The School of Good Manners. Composed for the Help of Parents in Teaching their Children How to Carry it in their Places during Their Minority* (1715; repr., Boston: T. and J. Elket, 1772), 17; *The Polite Academy,* 58.

not interrupting others. When speaking of someone, it was first, impolite to look at him or her, and to whisper and point. Lord Chesterfield wrote that it was uncouth to speak of personal concerns and private affairs in company. Gentlemen also were not to maintain a loud argument; they were expected to discuss their views in a calm tone or not at all. But when gentlemen *did* speak, knowledge of art, history, geography, and gardens was helpful in carrying on meaningful conversation with the other cultured gentlemen.[110]

Lord Chesterfield warned his son against the false pleasure to which young people often fell victim. Among these he included drunkenness, gaming, running after women, and swearing. These vices were "not the pleasures of what [Chesterfield] call[ed] people of fashion, but of those who only call themselves so."[111] He defined true pleasures as anything enjoyed in moderation while being in good company. Anything beyond moderation transcended into "low vice, brutal passion, debauchery, and insanity of mind; all of which, far from giving satisfaction, bring on dishonor and disgrace." Chesterfield's son was advised to find himself in the company of women, for it would improve his manners in a way that remaining in male company would never do. *The Polite Academy*

[110] Bushman, *The Refinement of America,* 84-85; Brathwaite, *The English Gentleman*, 47-48; *The Polite Academy,* 19; Moody, *The School of Good Manners,* 17-18; Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter XVII, October 16, 1747, 27.

[111] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter VII, March 27, 1747, 12. By this comment, Lord Chesterfield is implying that men were not to be considered gentlemen simply because they held the characteristics definitive of gentility. There was, according to his letters, a very specific implicit – and exclusive – to the status of gentlemen. This is not to mention the fact that the qualification for gentlemanly status also rested in public opinion of his pears. If this public acceptance did not exist, neither did a man's eligibility to the genteel class. For a contemporary example of this judgment on aspiring gentlemen, refer to an account by Dr. Alexander Hamilton in his travelogue, *The Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1774*, ed. Carl Bridenbaugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 13.

confirmed this by teaching that when men and women did not interact, "the women lose *their delicacy of taste* and the men *their manners.*"[112]

The presentation of genteel behaviors and possessions came to a peak of visual representation of civility on the dance floor. This was a time, according to Calvert, when a man's "costume, manner, grace, ease, and mastery of general accomplishments" best proved his genteel refinement. Although Lord Chesterfield was impartial to the merits of dancing for what it was worth, social tradition made dancing necessary for young men to take part in; as a result of this necessity, Chesterfield directed his son to do it well. *The Polite Academy*, through a letter from a mother to her daughter, instructed young women that "dancing is one of the most genteel and polite accomplishments which a young Lady can possess." The act of dancing showed all of the attributes of her stature while allowing her to show off the results of her proper education. The author of *The Polite Academy* also warned that "she who cannot walk, or stand, or even sit in a genteel, graceful manner, does not deserve the name of a good dancer." For the appeal of the young men, the author turned to John Locke, the Chevalier De Ramsay, and Giovanni Andrea Gallini to show the benefits of mastering the art of dancing. As a visual guide to the recommended stance during various dances, diagrams were also provided showing men and women the proper attitudes of the popular eighteenth-century dances.[113] All of this preparation and training for dances represented the amount of time and effort that gentlemen (both in England and her colonies) spent on presentations of their gentility.

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[112] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son*, Letter V, February 24, 1747, 8-9; Letter XXIII, July 30, 1747, 40; *The Polite Academy*, 14. On moderation, see, Brathwaite, *The English Gentleman,* 135-236; Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 152-153.

[113] Calvert, "The Function of Fashion in the Eighteenth-Century America," 272; Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter I, October 9, 1747, 2; *The Polite Academy,* 31-32, 69, 91-93.

By the American Revolution, the British American colonists had established a culture and civilization that valued many of the same characteristics as the traditional country gentry of England. At the top of society in Virginia, the colony leading the rest in established civility, one hundred families had enough wealth and status separate themselves from the lower classes.[114] With the aid of the consumer revolution, colonial adoption of English gentility during the eighteenth century made genteel possessions and privileges available to more affluent colonists.[115] Historians have argued that the establishment of gentility in southern states did not wane with the political upheaval of the mid-1700s – the values of the genteel class actually were solidified and developed further with the separation of the American colonies from Britain.[116] As chapter three will show, English travelers who traveled to the United States found a society that still cherished many of the same genteel values present in England.

[114] Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," 3.
[115] Carr and Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior," 132.
[116] See Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman,* 3; Sweeny, "High-Style Vernacular," 54.

CHAPTER III

BRITISH TRAVELOGUES, 1776-1800

The last quarter of the eighteenth century was a dynamic time for social development in North America. Not only was the newly-founded United States attempting to establish itself as a cultural entity separate from England, but the traits of gentility that had taken hold throughout the first part of the century continued to develop throughout the southern region. While English travelers of the late-eighteenth century disagreed on the degree of gentility present in southern activities and behaviors, for the most part, these traits included: horse racing and breeding, ownership of fine goods, attendance at social gatherings, advanced food quality, and hospitality. Plantation families held on to these traditions they had adopted from their British ancestors. As a result, despite its egalitarian foundation, the South remained distinctly British in some aspects of social appearance among the elite class.

Despite this, an examination of British travelogues from 1776 to 1800 shows that while some aspects of English gentility were present in Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina, others were not. Three prominent English travelers from this period discussed at length the existence of a few traits of gentility and the lack of others. From

this analysis, it is clear that while these travelers acknowledge the fact that several traits of gentility persisted in these southern states, they were not able to excuse the fact that the United States was essentially egalitarian. With this classless society, the young country lost any claim that it might have had on refinement.

John Ferdinand Smyth's *A Tour of the United States of America* (1784) is one of the first travelogues from the early national period that discussed the culture of the southern United States. Shortly after his return from the United States, Smyth was determined to read all that was available on the young country. However, by his own admission, he was disappointed that authors focused more exploration and the founding of a new nation rather than the "grand intercourse and commerce of life."[117] With the intention of correcting this oversight with "the most authentic information concerning that country," Smyth set out to write about his experiences in the United States.[118] A major portion of Smyth's publication included his experiences in Virginia. Publications of *A Tour* were sold by subscription initially and a number of nobility and British military men were among these subscribers. As a result, the contents of Smyth's book, including his assessment of gentility in Virginia, were circulated and read by the highest classes of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Englishmen.[119]

After a brief introductory chapter, Smyth analyzed the Virginia horse races. These events were held semi-annually in Williamsburg and, according to Smyth's account, enthralled the best of high society. Not only did the genteel class attend these events, but

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[117] J.F.D. Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America* (London: G. Robinson, J. Robson, J. Sewell, 1794), 1-2.
[118] Ibid., 2-3.
[119] Henry T. Tuckerman, *America and Her Commentators. With a Critical Sketch of Travel in the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1864), 188.

they also participated in every stage of preparation for the race.[120] Historians, with the support of Smyth's account, have established the fact that horse races had been an integral part of southern society since the seventeenth century. Southerners were attracted to any form of entertainment that promised a battle of abilities between men or between men and beasts.[121] Smyth emphasized the fact that, in Williamsburg, "the inhabitants, almost to a man, [were] quite devoted to the diversion of horse-racing."[122] In fact, according to Virginia C. Johnson and Barbara Crookshanks, experts on the history of horse racing, this event was one of the many social gatherings that the southern states adopted from seventeenth-century England where Charles II brought the sport into vogue after his exile in France. It was at the horse racing events that southern gentlemen could present their genteel attire and behaviors as well and their talents at horse breeding and training.[123]

Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown clarifies that, when it came to horse racing, while "men invariably expressed an indifference to the outcome, the depth of their involvement belied the outward show."[124] In Smyth's opinion, this could not be more obvious than with the Virginians' obsession with horses. The chief form of involvement for the Virginian planters, continued Smyth, was in the care of horses. While Smyth mocked the fact that Virginians would "frequently go five miles to catch a horse, to ride only one

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[120] Ibid., 21.
[121] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 132; Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 14.
[122] Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America,* 21.
[123] Virginia C. Johnson and Barbara Crookshanks, *Virginia Horse Racing: Triumphs of the Turf* (Charleston: The History Press, 2008), 18-19.
[124] Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 132.

mile upon afterwards," he recognized the importance of horses to the Virginian lifestyle.[125] In fact, historians have established the fact that horsemanship was one of the key skills of Virginians during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[126]

It was in horse breeding that the southern gentlemen showed their seriousness for the sport of horse racing. Smyth claimed that Virginian gentlemen, who could afford the sport, spent a great deal of time and effort recruiting the best breeds of racehorses from abroad. They then bred and trained these horses to be even better than their English counterparts. By Smyth's standards, "nothing can be more elegant and beautiful than the horses bred" in Virginia. In fact, by the end of the eighteenth century, "very capital horses [were] started [in Virginia], such as would make no despicable figure at Newmarket" races in England. England, and Europe in general, could not, according to Smyth, beat the superiority of the quarter horse of southern Virginia and North Carolina.[127]

It is with the sport of horse racing that the Virginians excelled at gentility. Smyth's evaluation of horse racing in Virginia offers proof to the popularity of horse racing in the region at the end of the eighteenth century. His account of Virginian race horses as compared to those who raced at Newmarket in England makes it seem as though the Virginian gentlemen spent so much time and money that they had developed a better looking and faster race horse than could be found in England. From this positive

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[125] Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 21, 23.
[126] Louis B. Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (1940; repr., Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1970), 86; John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 21.
[127] Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 21, 23.

reaction on the social event of horse racing, it appeared that the Virginians were succeeding in at least one genteel activity. In other aspects of lifestyle, however, Virginian planters did not measure up to the genteel standard of England, generally, and the expectations of Smyth, particularly.

Smyth recognized the importance of houses in the portrayal of gentility. As a result, he dedicated chapter three of *A Tour* to describing his journey up the James River where he stopped "at every place whose beauty of perspective, or singular appearance of any kind" attracted him. Many of these places included plantations of wealthy Virginians including: Charles Carter's Shirley Hundred, Ryland Randolph's Varina, William Randolph's Chatsworth, Mr. Mayho's place, Osborn's Bermuda Hundred, and Mr. Cary's seat. From his experiences at these residences along the James River, Smyth assessed the presence of gentility among the Virginia elite.[128]

Some plantations that Smyth visited reached the common perception of southern plantations: that, by this point, they had become physical representations of the massive wealth acquired by the Virginian elite. These seats served as "lovely" and "beautiful" breaks in the wilderness for Smyth. He believed that the planters' "versatility of taste," "perpetual alterations," and "agreeable" design of their prized plantation houses showed signs of European taste and gentility.[129]

A few of the residences did not receive praise by Smyth. While Kathryn Masson, author of *Historic Houses of Virginia*, placed Carter's Shirley Hundred at the center of

[128] Ibid., 25-28.
[129] Ibid.

Virginian "genteel life," Smyth found a house that, by 1784, had fallen into disrepair.[130] This residence and its inhabitants were known across the United States for their generosity and hospitality; the structure itself did not meet the standards of traveling British gentlemen such as Smyth.[131] Smyth recognized this and, through subtle terms, disapproved of the current conditions of genteel households of the wealthy planters. If the house was the best form of physical representation of social status during colonial times, the next generation of planters did not uphold the standard.[132]

Smyth described the wealthy Virginian planters as lazy. These "gentlemen of fortune," when not hosting company, rose around nine o'clock and walked the short distance to his stables to visit his horses. After a nine or ten o'clock breakfast, gentlemen often napped until a twelve o'clock lunch. He rested for the remainder of the afternoon and supped at nine or ten in the evening. After this meal, he "almost immediately retire[d] to bed."[133] This was the general daily schedule of the Virginian gentleman whom Smyth encountered. Although this portrayal was probably exaggerated, it emphasized the amount of leisure time available to a gentleman of means in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century.

Smyth's description of the wealthiest Virginians contradicted the lessons of courtesy books that were so popular in England throughout the eighteenth century. Despite the well-read lessons of Lord Chesterfield to not waste any moment of the day,

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[130] Smyth did not explain why Shirley Hundred had fallen into disrepair; Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 26-27.
[131] Kathryn Masson, *Historic Houses of Virginia: Great Plantation Houses, Mansions, and Country Places* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2006), 27; Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 26-27.
[132] Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America,* 25-28.
[133] Ibid., 41-42.

Smyth came across a completely different "genteel" lifestyle.[134] Instead of using leisure time for the development of manners and values, Smyth described the Virginian gentlemen as laying around all day, unless they were eating, with a slave fanning the flies – a rather lazy, unrefined lifestyle indeed!

Smyth's portrayal of the middling planter was not very different from that of the gentlemen; with only a slight alteration, they had much the same daily schedule. Upon waking four hours earlier than the gentleman, the middling planter almost immediately walked or rode out to his fields and other parts of his plantation where he spent the remainder of the morning. After a ten o'clock breakfast, these middling planters went about their day in much the same manner as the gentlemen of the higher class. Surprisingly, by Smyth's description of these two classes, it appeared that the only difference between them was between six and ten o'clock in the morning.[135]

Smyth's account of these two classes completely contradicts that presented by historians. They claim that the reason why middling planters were not able to participate in genteel activities and did not don imported goods was a lack of time and money.[136] Smyth's account, on the other hand, makes it seem as though the reason was due to a shortage of money, not time. If the only difference in daily schedules were four morning

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[134] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter XXI, December 18, 1747, 37; Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America*; 41-43.
[135] Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America,* 43.
[136] Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Changing Lifestyle and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 66, 104-105; Kevin M. Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular: Lifestyles of the Colonial Elite," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 34.

hours and the rest were spent lying around and eating, the middling planters would have had ample time to partake in genteel activities if they could afford it. While Smyth did not explicitly discuss the differences in income, he did offer insight into the contrast between lifestyle based on income.

Smyth also emphasized the distinction between greater and middling planter lifestyles in the late-eighteenth century through the consumption of food. Gentlemen had tea or coffee, bread and butter, and venison-ham for breakfast. For lunch they had "a draught of bombo, or toddy" with nutmeg, ham, greens, or cabbage. Dinner drinks consisted of "cyder, toddy, punch, port, claret and Madeira." When the lower class rose, they had a glass of julep and for breakfast, "cold turkey, cold meat, fried homminy, toast and cyder, ham, bread and butter, tea, coffee, or chocolate." The American dish of hominy, primarily consumed by the lower class, was made with boiled maize and French beans formed into dough and served hot. To Smyth's English taste, he found hominy "extremely harsh and unpleasant." While the lower classes had a choice of food, their lack of income restricted the quality of their food and drink. [137]

Smyth found some semblance of a higher standard of society in Virginia because there was a "greater distinction supported between the different classes of life." Above the slave population, there were three classes of whites, according to Smyth. On top, were "gentlemen of the best families and fortunes in the colony." Virginia gentlemen were equipped with a "liberal education," "enlightened understandings, and a thorough knowledge of the world." They possessed "an ease and freedom of manners and conversation" which compensated for their lack of genteel material possessions. In the

[137] Smyth, *A Tour of the United States of America,* 41-43, 48.

end, these gentlemen served as agreeable companions. Virginians were, according to Smyth, "generous, extremely hospitable, and possess[ed] very liberal sentiments."[138] It was the hospitality of these gentlemen that raised Smyth's opinion of Virginian gentility.

This practice of Virginian hospitality, as presented by Smyth, allowed traveling strangers to partake freely in the finest fruit and cider that they passed by, with or without the presence of the caretaker. Virginian gentlemen who heard of the presence of another gentleman-traveler in the area immediately offered his house for entertainment and lodging. Smyth claimed that Virginia gentlemen offered all of this "without even a hint being thrown out of a curiosity or wish to know his name." Hospitality had become the core of genteel training for Virginian southern planters of the late eighteenth century; but, by this period, other classes of Virginians possessed a few characteristics of gentility.[139]

Smyth estimated the second class of Virginians to contain about half of the population of the state and to be very diverse. As historians have established, Smyth recognized the fact that a few members of the lower class possessed genteel belongings and behaviors. In fact, Smyth went so far as to say that the top of this lower class showed all of the appropriate signs of gentility but simply lacked the ancient or heritage that local standards required of gentlemen. Other members of this class were rude, ferocious, and haughty; Smyth blamed a lack of education and their more frequent interaction with the slave population for the presence of these vices. Even at the end of the eighteenth century, according to Smyth, the lower class of Virginians was "all excessively attached to every species of sports, gaming, and dissipation, particularly horse-racing" and cock-

[138] Ibid., 65-67.
[139] Ibid., 69-71.

fighting – of which the latter activity Smyth abhorred. In general, Smyth concluded that this class of Virginians was contradictory; while some members had all of the qualifications of gentlemen (aside from a genteel lineage), other members partook in too many gentlemanly activities without the virtue of moderation in finery, gambling, and drinking.[140]

The bottom of white society in Virginia, according to Smyth, represented the manners and morals of a people who were not trained in the ways of a gentleman. The third class of white Virginians consisted of people who were "kind, hospitable, and generous" and yet "illiberal noisy, and rude." While this group consisted of a smaller number of the population, it made up for its size in noise. Members of the lowest class were seldom sober and suffered from too much curiosity and not enough ambition. Smyth attributed these uncouth characteristics on the fact that these southerners did not have the religious conviction of their peers in New England to soften their vices and, as a result, they were "disagreeable" and "troublesome" to English travelers. Although these Virginians were hospitable to travelers, a traditionally genteel characteristic, the great majority of Virginians possessed this trait making it no longer restricted to the higher class.[141]

Unlike Smyth's assertion, most historians focus on hospitality as a trait possessed by only the highest class of southerners. According to these historians, the treatment of visitors is one of the ways that the Virginian elite came closest to the characteristics of gentility found in England. According to Michal Rozbicki, the European tradition was

[140] Ibid., 69-71.
[141] Ibid., 68-69.

established as a trait reserved for the highest class during the medieval times. During this period, it became the central role of a Christian head of household to "receive all comers, rich or poor" and provide "food, lodging, and entertainment" for as long as the visitor required.[142] Historian Louis B. Wright argues that among the virtues of the wealthiest class in Virginia in the mid-seventeenth century, "hospitality was perhaps the most notable, and it carried in its train most of the other social graces and accomplishments."[143] Rozbicki claims that, in the plantation South, hospitality blended an excuse for the joy of sharing entertainment with visitors while allowing a "serious pursuit of rank." It gave planters the platform to present their highest refinement in dress, the greatness of their residence, social gatherings, and, especially, their graceful and easy manners.[144] While this historical interpretation is probably well founded, it is necessary to acknowledge the opinion of Smyth, a contemporary witness to the social habits to the various levels of society in Virginia, for his observations show how far down the social ladder genteel traits penetrated.

Overall, the society that Smyth encountered in Virginia pleased him; he found a few ways in which the Virginia elite excelled in gentility. The development of the gentleman sport of horse breeding and horse racing was so far advanced that it challenged the best horses of England's Newmarket. Many of the plantations along the James River were designed and kept up to the standard of a gentleman. These planters also possessed enough hospitality and genteel behavior and intelligence to make an English gentleman feel welcome in a strange land.

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[142] Michal Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 157-158.
[143] Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia*, 78.
[144] Ibid.

While some of the Virginian planter elite met the standards of gentility Smyth prescribed to, there were a few planters who did not. Some country residences, including Shirley Hundred, fell into such disrepair that it no longer represented the wealth required of a gentleman. When it came to the daily schedules of the wealthiest and middling planters, Smyth still found Virginians wanting. Although each of these classes had time enough in the day for leisure, Smyth encountered a people that would rather lie around and rest. Finally, while, of the three different social classes that Smyth attributed to the white population of Virginia, he found an entire class that possessed hospitality, members of the lower two classes had qualities of the same trait – which lessened its value among the higher class.

According to the assessment of Virginia by Smyth, the wealthiest planters adopted a genteel lifestyle that rested heavily on behavior but did not support this refined lifestyle with physical possessions. Rather than spend their income on repairing the structure of their house, Virginian planters spent their money on gambling, breeding and training racehorses, and food. As a result, by the standards of gentility set forth by the country gentry of England, the majority of the Virginian elite of the late eighteenth century did have sufficient physical representations of gentility to support their genteel presentation.

In 1794, a decade after the publication of Smyth's travelogue, Thomas Cooper responded to requests for more information concerning the situation of the United States. He originally left England for the United States in August 1793 and returned in February 1794. He intended on surveying the ability for large families with small fortunes to migrate to the United States. During his brief residence in North America, Cooper picked

up on the general social characteristics of the regions he visited. It was Cooper's opposition to the British monarchy that led him to investigate migration to North America. As a result, Cooper preferred the republican organization of the United States government. This preference, along with his opposition to slavery, translated into a different conclusion about the social development of the southern states than Smyth.[145]

Along his travels throughout the United States, Cooper determined which states were best suited for immigration. From the beginning of his assessment, Cooper ruled out the southern states (including Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina) for potential places of settlement due to the extreme heat, and, especially, slavery as the primary labor force. Cooper was one of the first English travelers to regard slavery as a negative attribute of the United States. Cooper's opinions on the institution of slavery and the treatment of slaves influenced many of his conclusions about the southern states.[146]

Cooper found a lack of fine goods on country plantations. While there were differences on availability and prices throughout the South, he believed that location – whether a person settled in town or in the country – determined if they could acquire fine goods easily. According to Cooper, in most towns, "European comforts and conveniences [were] not scarce" though they were more expensive. The country residents had more difficulty in acquiring such goods.[147] Perhaps this analysis of the importation of goods explains the struggle for the Virginian planters along the James River had in keeping their residences (such as Shirley Hundred) up-to-date on European genteel trends.

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[145] Thomas Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America* (London: J. Johnson, 1794), iii-iv.
[146] Ibid., 7-8, 20-21.
[147] Ibid., 48.

Cooper found American country life more to his liking than in his own country; this was based on "the state of society, and the style of living." Country estates in the United States could lie anywhere from 15 to 250 miles from a large town. In England there were three classes participating in country life – the rich proprietors and great lords, gentlemen farmers, and farming tenantry. Unlike the description of classes presented by Smyth, Cooper found the rich proprietary class still undeveloped by the turn of the century. In fact, the "*mass* of inhabitants, exclusive of servants, consist[ed] of those who possess[ed] in fee simple, from 100 to 500 acres of land, actually in cultivation."[148] These farmers actually owned the land that they cultivated and did not own rent tithes, or taxes to individuals above them in the social order; this separated the middling farmers from their British peers.[149] From Cooper's perspective, this group made up the majority of the population, and, therefore, were the leaders of society in the South.

Despite his generally negative commentary on the South, Cooper found that hospitality was readily available in the South as opposed to the North. The region between Massachusetts and Maryland relied on inns to provide lodging, food, and entertainment for travelers. The southerners, on the other hand, were more liberal in welcoming strangers into their homes and providing food and lodging.[150] Since Cooper did not believe that there was a rich planter class in southern United States, hospitality can not qualify as a genteel trait – according to his observation, hospitality was a trait of the middling planter. Once more, like Smyth, the traditionally genteel trait of hospitality

[148] Ibid., 50-52.
[149] Ibid., 72.
[150] Ibid., 52.

was cheapened by the fact that the majority of southerners during this period did their best to make strangers feel welcome.

Traditional education, on the other hand, was found lacking in the South. Generally, the South possessed means of acquiring knowledge and information. In fact, Cooper recognized the availability of newspapers, the presence of book societies, and that the majority of southerners possessed "good sense, and some reading." However, when it came to the European definition of learning, though, education was "uncommon."[151]

While it may seem odd that a society picked up certain traits of gentility but not others, modern historians have explained the process. Michal Rozbicki asserts that the success of hospitality in the eighteenth-century South was due to the fact that "unlike art and literature – it could be readily transplanted to the plantation colonies once the planters were affluent enough to accommodate it." While the planters may not have been as wealthy as the English, they were able to use their slaves to provide the preparation necessary to provide for the steady flow of visitors.[152] This may explain the dichotomy between the lack of education and the excessive hospitality that Thomas Cooper experienced in the South. While southerners could not acquire the necessary means to gain a genteel education, they were able to provide the means to house, feed, and entertain visitors to their region.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Cooper saw the United States as more conducive to the middling sort. He did not find the presence of an overly wealthy class that exploited the lower classes, as there was in Britain. In fact, the only beggar that

[151] Ibid.
[152] Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 161.

Cooper ran across was English. Cooper claimed that "no where in America" did there exist "the disgusting and melancholy contrast, so common in Europe, of vice and filth, and rags, and wretchedness in the immediate neighbourhood of the most wanton extravagance, and the most useless and luxurious parade." Where Smyth found three distinct classes of white inhabitants in Virginia, Cooper did not found the United States as stratified; instead, middling farmers dominated southern society.[153] This observation led to a different interpretation of gentility, as it existed in the United States.

Regarding the diffusion of classes, Cooper addressed the difference in genteel cultures between England and the United States. The top of the English class structure was tied to heredity to the degree that the two could not be separated. In the United States, however, Cooper claimed that "[a man was] estimated more at what he *is*, and less at what he *seems*." Like the monied interest of England during the first half of the eighteenth century, men were able to start from nothing and create a comfortable life.[154] In return, once he obtained a fortune, he also gained the social standing. In this new country, while traditional "European manners, and something of the ill effect of inequality of riches, is to be found," it was nothing "like what an inhabitant of the old country experiences." These negative effects of hierarchical society did not affect everyone like it did in England; social mobility was an option for motivated southerners.[155]

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[153] Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America*, 53-54.
[154] J. R. Jones, *Country and Court: England, 1658-1714* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 73. Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America*, 56-57.
[155] Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America*, 56-57.

Cooper's evaluation of the South is an interesting contrast to the characteristics of gentility already described. Cooper found middling farmers thrived on the lack of class stratification and exploitation. Instead, the social conditions of the United States were unlike the hierarchical society of his native country. Of those few genteel traits that Cooper discussed, he found hospitality to be the only one that he recognized and the majority of the South possessed it, which decreased its value as a genteel trait. On the other hand, Cooper preferred the educational organization of England over that which was established in the southern United States. As a result, Cooper's depiction of the South presented an uneducated, middling farm society that was not exploited by an upper class.

In 1799, Isaac Weld published *Travels Through the States of North America* and, as a result, drastically changed the genre of British travelogues.[156] Weld wished to experience the United States after hearing positive reviews of its "flourishing and happy condition." Originally, he did not intend to publish his experiences in North America; however, after noting his friends' lack of knowledge about the United States, he decided to publish what he had learned. While he held nothing but positive opinions of the country before his visit, Weld warned his readers in the preface that "if he returned with sentiments of a different tendency, they resulted solely from a cool and dispassionate observation of what chance presented to his view when abroad."[157]

[156] Martin Roth, Introduction to *Travels through the States of North America*, by Isaac Weld, ed. Martin Roth (1807; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), ix.
[157] Isaac Weld, *Travels through the States of North America*, ed. Martin Roth (1807; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), iii-iv.

As with Smyth, the construction of houses was one of the first things Weld discussed about Baltimore. While most of the houses in town were constructed of brick, others on the outskirts of town were made of wood. Although Weld found a few newer houses that were well constructed, the majority remained "small, heavy, and inconvenient." Within the town limits of Baltimore, at least, the houses were not the significant signs of gentility that the plantation South began developing earlier in the eighteenth century. While Weld did not discuss the interior conditions of the households, the external architecture remained simple and ungenteel in design, not unlike the clothing worn by the Baltimore elite.[158]

According to Weld, the majority of inhabitants of Baltimore made up for their lack of genteel attire and architecture with refined manners. They were "sociable however amongst themselves, and very friendly and hospitable towards strangers."[159] Weld's confirmation of hospitality in Baltimore ensures the fact that this genteel tradition was established in all four of the old, more-refined southern United States. This also verifies Louis B. Wright and Michal Rozbicki's claim that hospitality had become central to the gentrification of the southern United States.[160] In fact, hospitality had become so central to southern society that the lower class, as discussed by Smyth and Cooper, had picked up the tradition. This is one more way in which the un-refined classes of the South incorporated gentility into their lifestyle. Aside from hospitality, Baltimore offered an example of another way in which the inhabitants welcomed traveling gentlemen.

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[158] Ibid., 43-46.
[159] Ibid., 45.
[160] Michal Rozbicki, *The Complete Colonial Gentleman*, 157-158; Wright, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia*, 78.

As discussed in chapter two, social gatherings were key to the socialization of gentlemen. To fill this need, Baltimore offered several amusements that were fit for gentlemen. Residents hosted biweekly assemblies for the genteel, where cards and dancing were the popular activity. Also, a performance theater building stood in town and provided gentlemen and travelers occasional performances. These refined activities seemed to ease the demands of travel for Weld during his stay in Maryland.[161]

From Maryland, Weld traveled south to George Washington's residence in Virginia. While the environment and location of Mount Vernon, in relation to the surrounding wilderness, was agreeable, he found the furnishings of the house wanting.[162] In *Historic Houses of Virginia,* Kathryn Masson claims that George Washington made small repairs to the house when he took over residency from Lawrence Washington in 1754. George Washington then added an addition in 1757 and another series of additions from 1775 to 1787. Masson gives Washington credit for "a keen interest in architecture and an extensive architectural library" which helped in his developing the original four-room house into the mansion that Weld visited in 1794.[163] According to Weld, all of the rooms, except one, were built for entertainment. Despite their genteel purpose, these rooms were actually "very small" and "plainly furnished." Aside from the architecture of the building itself, Weld claimed that much of the furniture was "dropping to pieces." The oldest parts of the house were "in such a perishable state, that [Weld] had been told [Washington] wish[ed] he had pulled it entirely down at first, and built a new house,

[161] Weld, *Travels through the States,* 43-46.
[162] Ibid., 90-95.
[163] Masson, *Historic Houses of Virginia,* 68, 73.

instead of making any additions to the old one." Weld attributed the disrepair to the attentions that President Washington paid to the public affairs of the country.[164]

Despite these material conditions, Weld noted the hospitality that the staff showed toward traveling strangers. Weld's entourage was taken care of as soon as they arrived and were never left uncared for.[165] Weld's description of Mount Vernon is an extreme example of the juxtaposition of hospitality against a crude background of furniture and a house in disrepair. The fact that the residence was President Washington's adds to the magnitude of disrepair that has been described thus far in late-eighteenth century British travelogues. While historians have found proof of English architectural trends in the United States at this time, the planters that British travelers described did not represent the degree of gentility that historians have attributed to house building and maintenance of the southern planter elite.[166]

As Weld passed through Petersburg, Virginia, on his way to Norfolk, crowds assembled for a horse race, which, as Weld pointed out (and Smyth before him), was a "favourite amusement in Virginia." While Virginia C. Johnson and Barbara Crookshanks claim that the typical Virginia settlement usually hosted a horse race twice a year, Weld found that horse racing took place four to five times each year.[167] Unlike Smyth, Weld was not ready to admit that the quality of Virginia racehorses surpassed that of England; he believed that Virginia's "best bred horses" were still imported from England. Weld,

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[164] Weld, *Travels through the States of North America*, 90-95.
[165] Ibid.
[166] For examples of this argument, see, Masson, *Historic Houses of Virginia* and Sweeney, "High-Style Vernacular."
[167] Johnson and Crookshanks, *Virginia Horse Racing*, 41; Weld, *Travels through the States*, 185.

however, did admit that the talent of native-bred horses was not far from that of the English standard.[168]

Weld's description of the condition of horses in Virginia was much different than Smyth's. Weld wrote, "Virginians are wretched horsemen, as indeed are all the Americans I ever met with, excepting some few in the neighbourhood of New York." Not only did the Americans not know how to sit correctly upon the horse, they also had no idea how to hold the reigns properly or train the horse to have an easy gait.[169] According to Weld, the poor condition of horses could be found outside of horse racing.

Upon his second visit to Virginia the following spring, Weld witnessed a rather tragic situation. The horses he was supplied with were not only starved when he received them, but he could hardly find hay, fodder, or Indian corn for feed. While inhabitants he came across blamed the previous year's crop, Weld suspected that it had more to do with the demand of exportation and the rising prices of the crop; the inhabitants sold more than what they needed to survive.[170] The poor treatment of horses contradicts that of Smyth's praise for the Virginian's breeding and training of horses.[171] While, according to Weld, the breeding of racehorses was just under the English standard, the general training and care were not only incorrect, but they were harmful to the horses.[172]

The treatment of horses was not the only lack of refinement that Weld encountered in Virginia. The amount of gambling that took place in Richmond surprised

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[168] Weld, *Travels through the States,* 185.
[169] Ibid., 186-187.
[170] Ibid., 184.
[171] Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America,* 21, 23.
[172] Weld, *Travels through the States,* 184.

Weld. The majority of gambling, as well as cock-fighting, took place among the lower classes of society. Due to the prevalence of such uncouth behavior, Weld claimed, "such a set of people renders traveling extremely unpleasant." Weld's account of Richmond supports the training from the eighteenth-century courtesy books. Lord Chesterfield's lessons warned a previous generation of gentlemen the dangers of drunkenness, gaming, running after women, and swearing. In the late eighteenth century, Weld experienced the negative effects of the same bad habits; wherever gambling, drunkenness, and swearing were was no place for a gentleman.[173]

Generally, Weld's assessment of southern gentility was negative. While Baltimore offered more aspects of society that were fit for gentlemen, Virginia's standard of refinement was not to Weld's liking. Not only did the physical condition of Mount Vernon, the home of the first gentleman president of the United States, not impress Weld, but the traditionally social entertainment of Virginia did not suit Weld's idea of gentility. Virginians abused horses by not training and caring for them properly. The lower classes of society also had access to genteel social gatherings which resulting in an abuse of alcohol, gambling, and behavior that did not suit the genteel standard of England. Unlike Smyth and Cooper, who had a more moderate assessment of gentility in the southern United States, Weld was the first British traveler to disapprove so strongly of the established culture of the southern plantation society.

The English travelers of the late-eighteenth century did find several traits of gentility that persisted in the southern United States. First of all, Smyth and Weld

[173] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter VII, March 27, 1747, 12; Weld, *Travels through the States,* 191-193.

recognized the importance of horse racing in Virginia. Not only did the southern elite attend the social event, they took a great interest in participating in horse breeding and training. Also, all three of these travelers acknowledged that the importation of fine goods to the United States played an important role in the presentation of gentility among the planter class. It was only through importation that these wealthy Americans could acquire the fine goods that were required for a truly genteel lifestyle. Social gatherings such as horse racing, playing cards, attending the theater, and dancing were all a part of the southern elite lifestyle, according to travelers of the late-eighteenth century. Along with this, Smyth also recognized the fact that the wealthy planters enjoyed food that was better quality than the lower classes could afford. Food and social events, of course, played significant roles in the presentation of gentility among the planter society, as they were key to hospitality provided for travelers. This hospitality, as recognized by Smyth, Cooper, and Weld thrived in the South making Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina more comforting to the traveling gentlemen. All of these genteel traits, however, did not provide the southern planters with the level of gentility required to give them the label of aristocracy; there were characteristics necessary to gentility that English travelers did not find in the South.

While Smyth, Cooper, and Weld recognized several traits that mirrored English genteel characteristics, the southern planters still fell short in several ways. Although horse breeding was clearly important, Weld was unwilling to give the southern planters the same level of expertise as Smyth. In fact, Weld claimed that the best breeds in Virginia were still imported from England and the Virginians, as a whole, were incapable of training horses properly. They did not even provide enough feed to keep horses

healthy! This same level of disorder applied to the plantation houses. While some houses showed promise of genteel architecture and furnishings, other houses, such as Shirley Hundred and Mount Vernon, did not. These houses had fallen into disrepair and where additions had been made, furnishings and architecture remained simple and unrefined, the opposite of genteel. Finally, while Smyth and Weld recognized the presence of hospitality among the southern elite, Cooper's interpretation of southern society contradicted the idea that this characteristic was reserved only for the genteel farmers. Cooper did not find a rich proprietary class present in the South but he did find hospitality. This meant that the middling planters were already picking up the traditionally genteel traits of the aristocracy by this point in the eighteenth century. The fact that the middle class was able to possess the traits of hospitality contradicted its traditionally aristocratic nature. As a result, hospitality could no longer be a social characteristic to set the genteel apart from the rest of society.

Smyth, Cooper, and Weld's conclusions speak to an important conclusion about southern plantation society of the late-eighteenth century. While some refined manners and possessions of gentility were present there by the turn of the century, planters lacked important characteristics that were required to set them apart from the middling planter majority. By 1800, English travelers were finding more fault than proof of gentility among southerners. As chapter four will detail, this negative English commentary toward the merits of gentility in the southern United States did not cease with the end of the eighteenth century, in fact it continued.

CHAPTER IV

BRITISH TRAVELOGUES, 1801-1820

Although English travelers continued to find traits of gentility among the southern planters after 1800, they, like the eighteenth-century travelers, found necessary genteel characteristics missing. In the eighteenth century, travelers focused mostly on the lack of refinement in architecture and household furnishings, social gatherings, horse breeding and training, and manners. As this chapter will show, English travelers of the early nineteenth century also focused on these basic genteel traits but they also looked at another respect in which the southern planters were not genteel. In their commentary of the plantation lifestyle these travelers discovered different priorities concerning the wealth of the southern planters. Travelers also found that when it came to lavish lifestyles, most southern planters presented a façade to their peers and traveling gentlemen. These major concerns presented by nineteenth-century Englishmen point to the central issues concerning the status of gentility in the southern United States.

John Bernard began his extended tour in the United States in 1797. During the fourteen years he was in the country, he traveled to many different regions picking up on characteristics of the Americans. In the introduction to the 1887 reprint of his

Retrospections of America, Laurence Hutton and Brander Matthews claim that Bernard was unique as a traveler due to his open mind and his "unusual opportunities for the study of American habits in town and in country." It is these unusual opportunities that allowed for the gentility present in the South to be apparent.[174]

Bernard spent the summer of 1799 in Virginia, particularly in and around Richmond and Norfolk. During this time, many of the planters in the region invited him to visit their residences. During these visits, Bernard came into contact with Virginia gentlemen who, as courtesy books taught the colonial gentry, were disciplined with their superiors and reserved with their peers.[175] As soon as a stranger stepped through their door, Bernard explained "a warmth – truly Irish – succeeded, and [the stranger was] welcomed to a land of liberty." Not only did Bernard find the welcome of the southern elite hospitable, but he also conversed with "men of high intelligence and even refinement, whose conviviality not making its agenda its end, could be, like their own summers, as radiant as it is warm."[176] This general hospitality of the wealthy Virginian planters matched the genteel lifestyle that Bernard experienced.

Bernard related the lifestyle of Virginian planters to that of "the old feudal barons," from which the social standard of the English country gentry developed.[177] The

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[174] Lawrence Hutton and Brander Matthews, Introduction to *Retrospections of America, 1797-1811*, by John Bernard, ed., Mrs. Bayle Bernard (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), v.

[175] See discussion in chapter two on the behaviors that courtesy books emphasized while in the company of others.

[176] John Bernard, *Retrospections of America, 1797-1811,* ed., Mrs. Bayle Bernard (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886), 146.

[177] Ibid., 147-148. For further discussion on the development of the English country elite from the societal characteristics of the feudal barons see, Diane Bornstein, *Mirrors of Courtesy* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1975), 9.

planters' lives centered on temptation with "the only [one] check upon their passions – goodness of heart." Bernard blamed the presence of such base activities as "mint-sling, jockeyship, and cock-fighting" on the lack of contact outside of their own class and "the worst exportations of Europe." Former generations of Virginians did not have access to the benefits of refinement that contemporary planters had.[178]

In matters of domesticity, Bernard found that the French influenced the planters' taste. He found, like other travelers, the Virginians were "deficient in architectural beauty or stability." While previous English travelers focused mostly on this disrepair of the household and architecture, Bernard established the fact that the plantation houses that he visited had "internal palaces" in which the furniture, displays, and musical instruments were all imported from Europe.[179] This importation of finery is proof that the Virginians attempted to own fine assets as a physical representation of their social status.[180] This is an unexplained divergence from the accounts made by Smyth and Cooper who claimed both architecture and furnishings were in bad condition. Bernard did not stop here with his compliments of Virginian gentility.

Bernard found that the Virginia planters backed their possession of imported finery up with genteel conversation. The refinement that the Virginia elite showed through this type of conversation surprised Bernard. He claimed that their favorite subjects were "European, and personal gossip of London and Paris." He soon discovered the cause of such seemingly unusual topics of interest among the planters: "they had all been educated in France or England." Bernard claimed that this trans-Atlantic education

[178] Bernard, *Retrospections of America,* 147-148.
[179] Ibid., 148.
[180] Ibid., 149-150.

ended with independence from England. But, despite the end of this tradition, many of the planters continued their correspondence with Europe and strengthened their social ties to Europe allowing the Virginian elite to converse at the same level as English gentlemen.[181]

Wealth and leisure coupled with the warm climate of the South encouraged a focus on entertainment, according to Bernard's account. The most popular sports and entertainment activities that the Virginia planters took part in was English in origin. To illustrate this, Bernard discussed horseracing, which remained "the ruling diversion" throughout the South. After attending Virginia's best track at Williamsburg, Bernard declared that "better order and arrangement, [he] had never seen at Newmarket." He established that at the races he attended, the majority of the riders were actually the owners of the horses.[182] These owners, others told Bernard, possessed "knowledge of the science of jockeyship" that would challenge the English nobility.[183]

While the activities associated with horse racing remained similar to that in England, Bernard accompanied gentlemen-planters on other sporting activities that were not as similar. Although Bernard spent less time in the woods hunting with other gentlemen, he was one of the first British travelers to describe the characteristics of the Virginian sport and how it differed from England. According to Bernard, the English sport consisted of a group of gentlemen who met at a predetermined location on horse to

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[181] Ibid., 149-150.
[182] Ibid., 154. Virginia C. Johnson and Barbara Crookshanks support Bernard's claim by establishing the fact that "many [horse] owners took an active part in their racers, training or even riding them on occasion." See Virginia C. Johnson and Barbara Crookshanks, *Virginia Horse Racing: Triumphs of the Turf* (Charleston: The History Press, 2008), 48.
[183] Bernard, *Retrospections of America,* 154.

pursue a fox or deer until it was captured. In the wilderness of the United States, however, the overpopulation of the prey forced the locals to alter the English tradition. Virginians went into the forest and "beat up the quarters of anything, from a stag to a snake" to encourage the chase. If an animal took the bait and charged, and the environment was conducive, the chase would commence. Each chase had its own set of contests based around the challenge to track a fast animal. While this version of hunting was much different than its English model, the wealthiest of Americans still practiced it.[184]

Within his text, Bernard also made a few distinctions between Virginian and Carolinian gentlemen. In fact, Bernard found Carolinians to be significantly less educated and their manners less refined.[185] Despite these deficiencies, Bernard found "that the South Carolinians displayed comparative refinement, a love of books and the arts, and a share of polite as well as solid information." Overall, he found the Carolinians just a step below Virginians in refinement.[186] While the day time was spent in the company of overseers and other company at local taverns, during leisure time, the Carolinian planters enjoyed the same entertainments as Virginians – racing, gambling, cock-fighting, hard drinking, and dancing.[187] While the popular social gatherings and entertainment remained the same in the three states, the primary difference between Virginians and Carolinians laid in the fact that the Carolinians had not developed their education and manners to the

[184] Ibid., *156-157.*
[185] Smyth, *A Tour of the United States of America* (London: G. Robinson, J. Robson, J. Sewell, 1794), 103-105; Bernard, *Retrospections of America*, 205.
[186] Bernard, *Retrospections of America,* 209.
[187] Ibid., 206.

level of Virginians. This accounted for Bernard's calculation of Carolinians being inferior in terms of gentility to the Virginians.[188]

Bernard was also one of the first British travelers to notice that the majority of physical representations of gentility were manifested in imported furniture, pictures, and musical instruments. Aside from these physical possessions, the Virginians' knowledge of England and France allowed for better quality of conversations. Their European education and correspondence served the Virginians well for they were able to hold genteel conversations with English travelers. While the education and refinement of the Carolinians was not at the same level, they still enjoyed the same entertainment and social activities. These activities included horseracing and hunting. While each sport differed from their English counterparts, Virginians and Carolinians were able to entertain themselves in a comparatively genteel manner. Overall, according to Bernard's account, the level of crudeness among in Virginians and the Carolinians was more limited than other travelers had claimed before – restricted mainly to the exterior of houses, and the education and refinement of the Carolinians.

In 1803, John Davis wrote of his experiences in the United States in *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America.* Although he dedicated the text to, then-President Thomas Jefferson, Davis admitted that he still believed the political organization of Britain to be perfect. Instead of focusing on the political differences between England and the United States, he attempted to offer "remarks on the character, the customs and manners of the people" of North and South Carolina so that readers

[188] Ibid., 205.

might look at their own manners and compare the lifestyles and refinement of the two nations.[189]

Davis's first task upon landing in the United States was to find something to employ his time; he thought he could become a private tutor. His conversation with a Mr. Caritat called into question Davis's qualifications. Caritat's questioning brought up knowledge of major subjects that were required for such a position. These included Latin and Greek, mathematics, handwriting and cyphering, and rhetoric. The fact that Caritat pointed specifically to these subjects shows their importance to wealthy families who could afford a private tutor.[190] Caritat's emphasis on certain subjects as an essential foundation of education tells of the persistence of these subjects as important to the planter class. As in the training of the genteel classes in England and the British colonial America by courtesy books and the lessons of Lord Chesterfield, weight was placed on mathematics, language, and reading and writing.[191] Despite Lord Chesterfield's insistence on the importance of studying history and geography, Caritat made no mention of these

[189] John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America* (Bristol, Eng.: R. Edwards, 1803), vii, 3.
[190] Ibid., 18-19.
[191] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son*, Letter XXIII, December 29, 1747; Henry Peacham, *The Complete Gentleman* (London, 1627), 18. *Early English Books Online,* eebo.chadwyck.com.argo.library.okstate.edu/ (Accessed March 1, 2011); for further discussion on the subjects Peacham discussed, see Wright, *The First Gentlemen in Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class* (1940; repr., Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1970), 15.

subjects.[192] Considering that the wealthy planters hired the majority of tutors, obviously mathematics, language, and reading and writing were the most important subjects.[193]

After advertising his service as a tutor in the newspapers of Charleston, Davis called upon the first inquirer, a planter just outside of town. When informing the planter of his qualifications, the planter asked about Davis's level of interest in literature. The mistress of the plantation happened to be fond of poetry, especially "Ode to Solitude." Upon hearing this, Davis proclaimed that Pope's "Ode to Solitude" was a satisfactory work if intended for children. Upon the mistress's inquiry as to Davis's opinion on another poet, Dr. Johnson, Davis boldly informed her that he gave "a decided preference to his Epitaph on a Duck, written, if [he] mistake[n] not, when [the poet] was four years old. It need scarcely fear competition with Pope's Ode on Solitude."[194] With this statement, Davis brought the mistress's poetical interests to the level of four-year-olds. Clearly the mistress's taste in poetry was below her station as a lady, and, as a result, Davis did not appreciate the intellectual level of their conversation.

In fact, when the eldest daughter came into the room and her mother encouraged her to recite "Ode on Solitude," he attempted to leave. The planter then claimed that the recitation would only take ten minutes and insisted that Davis stay. When this appeal did

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[192] Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son,* Letter I, October 9, 1746, 2; Letter IV, December 9, 1746; Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half,* 18-19.
[193] Hunter Dickinson Farish, *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion* by Philip Vickers Fithian, ed., Hunter Dickinson Farish, 2nd ed. (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1957), xvi.
[194] Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half,* 49.

not work, the planter said he would hire Davis as a tutor, which then gave him the position to force Davis to stay. Davis declined the job offer and left.[195]

Davis noted that he included this story not as a stereotype of the attitude of all "purse-proud" planters but in hope that he could "hold the mirror up to the inflation of pride, and insolence of prosperity" to benefit his readership. Despite Davis's intent, his conversation with the planter and his wife also determined traits of gentility. While poetry was important to the cultivation of a gentleman, it was also necessary for the sophisticated to understand the quality of literature. Evidently, the planter was not interested in poetry and, as a result, could not understand that his wife's level of appreciation was the same as a child. Despite Davis's forward comments, neither the planter nor his wife understood that they were the ones in the wrong; they were only making fools of themselves and a mockery of their genteel social status.[196]

In North Carolina, Davis came across a man who accurately represented the level of refinement among the wealthy in the region. Davis remarked that this man's unpowdered hair "resembled an ancient *Roman*" and that this trend, along with that of his dress, was new to the Charleston scene, while, in England, this fashion was already out of style. Unlike in Europe, however, this man owned the horse he rode and the servant who accompanied him. Davis concluded that ownership was "the pride of the people of *Charleston"* so that "he without horses and slaves, incur[ed] always contempt." In fact, "property ha[d] such an empire over the mind, that poverty and riches [were] contemplated through the medium of infamy and virtue." Davis concluded that while

[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.

fashion and comforts of Americans were behind England, Americans replaced this emphasis on trendsetting with property ownership as a standard for social stratification.[197]

During his stay in the United States, Davis was invited to stay at the plantation of a Mr. Drayton and his family. Though the Draytons received Davis "with much affability," he, at first, dreaded his stay in the North Carolinian woods for an entire winter.[198] However, after the initial disappointment, Davis cherished the "solitude of the woods" with "the polite attention of an elegant family a sparkling fire in my room every night, and a horse always at my command." The Drayton residence offered a form of solitude that Davis was unable to duplicate with the hustle and bustle of the town lifestyle.[199] Davis's account of this plantation offers an unusual description of the surroundings, activities, and priorities of a North Carolinian plantation that other British travelers were not able to access.

Drayton owned a large plantation but his house was made out of logs, "a temporary fabric built to reside in during the winter." Despite the meager establishment, the meals were always abundant and the "elegance of manners" at the table "might have vied with the highest circles of polished *Europe.*" Drayton was a gentleman of honor and his wife's "beauty and elegance were her least qualities." She was tender, a "sincere friend," and "walked humbly with her God."[200] Davis's description shows that the Drayton family placed less stress on the presentation of the house, and more on provision the hospitality, food, and good company – all traditional genteel characteristics. Just as

[197] Ibid., 107.
[198] Ibid., 66.
[199] Ibid., 68-70.
[200] Ibid., 75-76.

Smyth described a contrast of lifestyles that the planter elite took part in, Davis presented the same image with the two Drayton residences.

During May 1799, John Davis accompanied the Drayton family as they migrated to their "politer residence of their mansion on the *Ashley River.*"[201] Among their neighbors was Drayton's elder brother. This brother owned what Davis believed to be "the largest house and gardens in the United States." During his stay on the Ashley River, Davis claimed that he was "breathing the politest atmosphere in *America"* because visitations were constant and by "the highest people of the State," whose population of house servants could populate a small town. These dignified neighbors always traveled by carriage and sat on "sophas" rather than chairs while their slaves fanned them with peacock feathers. Preferring the solitude that the country plantation offered, every time a new visitor's carriage was announced Davis "always took up [his] gun, and went into the woods. Oh! For a freedom from the restraint imposed by well-bred inanity."[202] Clearly, after his stay in the woods, the attempted refinement of the wealthiest South Carolinians did not impress him. Even though residents along the Ashley River provided a genteel lifestyle for Davis to enjoy, he tried as much as possible to not do so.

When Davis visited North Carolina, he took part in the unique experience of deer hunting, "the chief diversion of the Planters." Planters traveled to a spot in the woods and took their spots at several distances. A couple of slaves led beagles into the thickest part of the forest and the dogs dislodged a deer from its hiding place. At this point, the deer attempted to escape and the gentlemen shot at it. While Davis always went with

[201] Ibid., 114.
[202] Ibid., 106.

companions on hunting excursions, he did not gain very "much pleasure from standing several hours behind a tree."[203]

From these few interactions with southern gentlemen, it is clear that Davis was not impressed with the majority of the planter society of the Carolinas. Davis's positive experience with the Drayton family was an exception. In contrast, the planter family that he discussed poetry with and his neighbors on the Ashley River represented a people who were trying desperately to come off as genteel when, in fact, they were only annoying. According to Davis, the majority of North and South Carolinian planter society tried too hard to fit a genteel societal standard. Like the middling class of the colonial period who picked up trends after the fashion had transitioned, the North and South Carolinian planters' flamboyance and disregard belied their true social status.

John Lambert continued this trend of publishing his experiences among the society of the wealthy South Carolinian planters. In *Travels through Lower Canada, and the United States of America*, published in 1818, he left descriptive accounts of his stay in Charleston during 1808. Like Davis, Lambert's assessment of the society in and around Charleston was negative. Among his other criticisms, it was Lambert that discovered the façade that southern planters presented for outsiders.

While Charleston had much to offer in the way of entertainment, the quality was lacking. Although there was a theater in town, it was rather insignificant. At the time of Lambert's visit, the British-American Embargo Act of 1807 had, in a month, "reduced the performers to *half-pay*." The Vauxhall, a garden on Broad-street, was also

[203] Ibid., 102.

disappointing. According to Lambert it was not as elegant as the common tea-gardens of London. On the other hand, the Planters' hotel and other private boarding houses available in the town served as proper lodging and entertainment for travelers.[204]

With these meager offerings for travelers, Lambert was skeptical about the hospitality of the South Carolinians he came into contact with. In fact, in his travelogue, Lambert addressed the common English belief that Charleston was the "seat of hospitality, elegance, and gaiety" during the nineteenth century. He claimed that, while hospitality existed, the presence of elegance and gaiety was definitely lacking despite the potential of many amusements available in the area. Lambert believed that the yellow fever attack of the previous year had some affect on the outward sociability of Charleston residents.[205]

While visiting the area, like other visitors, Lambert investigated the sport of horse racing. Rather than focus on the logistics of the event itself, he mentioned the specifics of the event and the general effect of horse racing on the prosperity of families. Attendees paid to enter the track and gambled extensively on each race. These practices often put strain on the wealthiest of families. The race that Lambert attended was not as popular as he expected. That year, the largest purse was six hundred dollars – the previous year the peak purse was a thousand. Lambert and other people who attended the event speculated

[204] Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada, and the United States of America*, 3 vols. (London: T. Gillet, 1810) 2: 136-137, 139, 140.
[205] Ibid., 146.

that it was due to the "dullness of the times" with the attack of yellow fever and the general shortage of income.[206]

According to Lambert, these benefits of social entertainment were strictly for the "planters, principal merchants, public officers, divines, lawyers, and physicians" of Charleston. Generally, the planters were the wealthiest people in the state. This wealth did not mean that the planters were cash-rich, though. In fact, Lambert did not approve of the plantation society. He claimed that the only time the planters actually had money was when they sold their cotton or rice. While this money could have lasted a long time, the planters already owed unpaid balances to the merchants and traders. Lambert speculated that whatever wealth the planter elite claimed in this region did not take into account their debts. According to Lambert, those debts outweighed whatever refinement and hospitality was present in South Carolina. Even when the planters had money, they spent it immediately; they partook in the luxury of "fashion, good eating and drinking, or an excursion to the northern states." This excessive living came in the form of travel with servants and the planters "frequently returned home in the *stage coach* with scarcely dollars enough in their pockets to pay their expenses on the road." The luxuries that the plantation elite enjoyed robbed them of the virtue of moderation that British gentility required.[207] This form of lifestyle also robbed the South Carolinian planters of the wealth that the colonial elite developed as the foundation of the genteel class.

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[206] Ibid., 151-153. When speculating the reason for small attendance at the races Lambert did not factor in the detrimental effects of the Embargo Act of 1807 on the current wealth of planters in the region. See Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada, and the United States of America*, 2: 151-153.

[207] John Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada, and the United States of America*, 2: 146-147.

Like John Ferdinand Smyth of the eighteenth century, Lambert had a negative sense of the daily habits of the planter class. First, when compared to the industry of northern merchants and farmers, the South Carolinian planter "loll[ed] at his ease under the shady piazza before his house, *smoking segars* and drinking *sangoree*; while his numerous slaves and overseers [cultivated] a rice swamp or cotton field." South Carolinian planters, according to Lambert, possessed more slaves, and, therefore, more wealth, but their carriages showed more signs of wear and tear than their northern counterparts. Like Weld, Lambert believed that southern horses were bred well but poorly trained and difficult to ride. The lavish public lifestyle of town only masked the crude behaviors and condition prevalent throughout the planter elite of South Carolina.[208]

Lambert believed that, in Charleston, the planters had "handsome houses," for which they lived for a time "like princes." The elegance of the planters' residences and their charm and hospitality fooled visitors into believing that this was the general lifestyle of the planter class. However, while hospitality and "wine flow[ed] in abundance," it only lasted as long as the cash flow continued. What the typical visitor did not know was that the cash only lasted as long as the planters remained in Charleston. The planters retired to their plantations when they no longer had money to sustain their town lifestyle. Of course, with the money went all hospitality and elegance. According to Lambert, this cycle continued indefinitely.[209]

The majority of the strangers who visited the area only saw the lifestyle of Charleston, according to Lambert, and, as a result, assumed that the same luxury and

[208] Ibid., 149-151.
[209] Ibid., 147-149.

comfort existed on the plantation. Others, who were able to see the different lifestyles of town and country, made more balanced judgments on the refinement of the South Carolinian planter elite. Those who visited the plantations saw that "every thing [had] hundreds of slaves about them, and cattle of various kinds" and the plantation often went "without butter, cheese, and even milk, for many weeks." Fodder was scarce which forced livestock to the forest to scrounge for their own meals to prevent starvation. The residences were "also in a dilapidated state, and destitute of the comforts and conveniences of domestic life."[210]

In general, Lambert depicted the wealthiest planters of South Carolina as unrefined. While the potential for a genteel culture existed in and around Charleston, the indulgences of the planters resulted in a wild lifestyle. Lambert portrayed the desires of this class equivalent to a child. They spend money on lavish lifestyles until they drove themselves further into debt. Once they reached their limit of expenditures in town, they sulked home where they led a meager life and only looked forward to the next time they would be able to go on another spending spree. While Lambert's account is more exaggerated than most British travelers, there are a few commonalities. Lambert's description of the lifestyle of the wealthy South Carolinians has a striking similarity to that of Davis. While Davis published his quiet and modest experience with the Draytons, their lifestyle was an exception.

Morris Birkbeck, an English farmer of a 1500-acre leased estate, traveled to the United States to scout the best location for a settlement that he and an acquaintance planned on developing. Through his travel to the Illinois territory, he came into contact

[210] Ibid.

with a few interesting American characteristics and manners, which he compared to old England. He published these comparisons in *Notes on a Journey in America* in 1818. Birkbeck's preparation for such a journey consisted of over a year's-worth of correspondence with Americans and a good number of letters of introduction.[211] His criticism of the southern states is founded on slavery.[212]

At Harrison's Bar, near Norfolk, Virginia, while waiting for the next tide, Birkbeck had the pleasure of conversing with a gentleman and ladies on their plantation. Birkbeck found the plantation well-manicured, but the manners of its inhabitants "reminded [him] of home."[213] Like other nineteenth-century travelers, Birkbeck expressed surprise at finding a people on this side of the Atlantic who could converse at the same level of gentility as himself.

This interaction persisted as he traveled to other cities in Virginia. While in Petersburg, Birkbeck attended the horse races, where he came into contact with "a large assemblage of planters" and was "introduced to a considerable number of well-informed persons of that class."[214] From his interactions, Birkbeck defined the Virginian planter as "a republican in politics" who "exhibit[ed] the high-spirited independence of that character." He described planters as those who wore anything that resembled style, base in their ownership of slaves, irritable, and lacking of manners. As a complete contrast,

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[211] Morris Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America*. 4th ed. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966), Forward, 6.
[212] Ibid., 5-10.
[213] Ibid., 11, 13, 14.
[214] Ibid., 15-16.

after much conversation with these gentlemen after the horse race, their level of intelligence pleased Birkbeck.[215]

Upon reaching the Alleghany Mountains, Birkbeck took time to comment on the differences in the civilization of the United States and England. In fact, the level of civility present in Virginia impressed him. During his stay, he "ha[d] not for a moment lost sight of the manners of polished life." The refined material possessions, on the other hand, were far more rare than in England. While the Virginians presented themselves in a genteel way, they did not own the required possessions to support such gentility.[216]

While these comments about southern society in Virginia were brief, Birkbeck had an interesting perspective. He was not a member of the gentry in England; he was looking to better his situation economically by starting a new settlement in Illinois. Despite this, he expressed his opinions of Virginian high society and passed judgments on the planter class. Birkbeck did not approve of the level of gentility present in the settlements he visited in Virginia. While Virginia planters presented the lifestyle of gentility and had an education comparable to the English elite, they did not actually have the wealth and possessions of gentlemen. This limited their social position as gentlemen.

The English travelers of the early nineteenth century did find some aspects of society that pleased them. The authors who discussed southern education, Bernard, Davis, and Birkbeck, were surprised to find that southern planters were able to converse at the same level as English gentlemen. Bernard found that this was due to their English and French educations; as a result, their favorite subjects were European in origin and

[215] Ibid., 15-16.
[216] Ibid.,, 35.

were often related to the gossip of London and Paris. Davis's report on the important subjects to southerners matched those stressed by the courtesy books of the colonial period. Bernard also found, unlike other travelers, that the interior of the plantation households were equipped with furniture, displays, and musical instruments imported directly from Europe. The level of expertise involved in horse racing and breeding rivaled the best of England. Davis discovered a rich, refined culture on the Ashley River in North Carolina that thrived on the presentation of gentility through social visits and gatherings backed by household grandeur and fine possessions.

Despite these positive attributes among the southern plantation society, there were several faults that nineteenth-century English travelers could not ignore. The story that Davis told about the planter family outside of Charleston with more ego than education speaks to the ignorance of some planters. While Bernard had a positive reaction to the interiors of plantation households, in general travelers were not impressed. The architecture and maintenance of the households, both inside and out, were lacking in refinement. Davis's encounter with the North Carolinian gentleman who was wearing fashions that were already out of style in England but who had pride in the ownership of his own horse offers insight into the priorities of the American planters as opposed to their counterparts in England. The southern planters preferred the possession of property to spending their wealth to purchase the newest fashions of England. While Davis was generally not impressed with the American hybrid of the sport of hunting, Lambert found fault with social gatherings throughout his travels; while the foundation was in place for a very entertaining society with theater buildings and parks and assembly halls, Lambert

found that gentlemen he encountered did not take the extra effort to plan social events – and when they did, they were not to his standard of gentility.

With the turn of the nineteenth century, English travelers expressed a more in-depth criticism related to the plantation lifestyle of the southern United States. Lambert was the first to describe explicitly the excessive spending habits of planters. He argued that the refined society of the plantation elite lasted only as long as the income from the last harvest lasted. Lambert claimed that the planters were not cash-rich, and when they had a little money, they were quick to spend it driving themselves further into debt and forcing them to retire to their meager plantation residences. While Davis's interpretation of the plantation lifestyle was a little more discreet, he found similar conditions – the planters and their families lived simply on the plantation and then migrated to another residence for a portion of the year where lavish lifestyles abounded.

The majority of the travelers agreed that while the southern planters had the time and energy to focus on improving their education and manners as well as improving their plantations, they were unwilling to spend the extra money it took to own the fine belongings to support a genteel status. As chapter five will discuss, the commentary provided by English travelers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offers insight into the difference between gentility in England and the southern United States and the effect of egalitarianism.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The traditional English gentility had its foundation in the thirteenth century and was only obtainable for members of the court. By the seventeenth century, gentility was reserved for the aristocratic nobility and gentry. Legitimization of refined social characteristics was only possible, according to English tradition, through physical representation and inner-virtue. By the eighteenth century, English colonists in North America adopted a few genteel characteristics. This process has interested historians because gentility was a social development aristocratic in nature and the English colonies in North America had a distinctly egalitarian foundation. This leads to the question: exactly how genteel were early American planters? As the English travelers between 1776 and 1820 established, while planters held on to a few of the characteristics of gentility, there were several characteristics of the egalitarian United States that prevented planters from developing all of the genteel traditions of England. These traits were founded in the two forms of gentility, established in England: physical representation and inner-virtue.

Historians have proven that the consumer revolution allowed colonists, and later, Americans, access to the same material goods that the English gentlemen deemed refined, and, therefore, necessary to establish gentility. To support this argument, John Bernard found the plantation houses that he visited to be "internal palaces" with furniture, displays, and musical instruments imported from Europe.[217] Many of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English travelers, however, provided evidence to the contrary.[218] Even Bernard recognized that physical distance from a proper refined society hindered the ability of Americans to possess refined provisions. According to Thomas Cooper, access to the ports and railway systems and the money required to afford such imports kept many of the wealthiest American planters from maintaining a refined material culture.[219] John Davis found that, while on the Drayton plantation, they valued polite mannerisms over physical representations of gentility.[220] While travelers like Isaac Weld and Morris Birkbeck simply commented that many planters lacked genteel possessions, John Lambert offered a more detailed explanation; he believed that the shortage of fine goods was due to a simple financial mismanagement by the planters.[221]

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[217] John Bernard, *Retrospections of America, 1797-1811,* ed. Mrs. Bayle Bernard (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886), 146.
[218] See Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Changing Lifestyles and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth* Century, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 61-62.
[219] Thomas Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America* (London: J. Johnson, 1794), 48.
[220] John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America* (Bristol, Eng.: R. Edwards, 1803), 75-76.
[221] Isaac Weld, *Travels through the States of North America,* ed. Martin Roth (1807; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 45; Morris Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America,* 4th ed. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966), 35; John Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada and the United States of America,* 3 vols. (London: T. Gillet, 1810) 2: 147-149.

Southern planters let their carriages and houses fall into disrepair while they spent their year's profit in a few weeks of excessive living.[222]

Magnitude of the house, another form of physical representation of gentility, was of a special importance to most English travelers. While four of the English travelers examined found an element of gentility in the architecture or internal construction, they all agreed that the plantation houses of the southern elite were, overall, not indicative of gentility. As John Ferdinand Smyth and Isaac Weld described, some houses were "lovely" and "beautiful" representations of the planters' wealth, but others, like Carter's Shirley Hundred and Washington's Mount Vernon, did not meet the standards of English gentlemen.[223] John Bernard found evidence of French influence in the domestic tastes of American houses but, overall, he remarked that Virginians lacked "architectural beauty or stability."[224] Even John Davis discovered a difference in the lifestyles that the Drayton family exhibited at their two residences; while their plantation house had a simple construction and furnishings, the Draytons saved their "polite" possessions for the higher living among their peers on the Ashley River.[225]

These English travelers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had many conclusions concerning the level of gentility possessed by American planters. First, they agreed that wealth was not an obstacle. Instead, it was their location that restricted their access to finer imported goods. On the other hand, travelers were not impressed with the architectural practices of the planter elite in the American South. Not only did English

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[222] Ibid.
[223] J. F. D. Smyth, *A Tour of the United States of America* (London: G. Robinson, J. Robson, J. Sewell, 1794), 25-28; Weld, *Travels through the States,* 90-95.
[224] Bernard, *Retrospections of America,* 148.
[225] Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America,* 75-76, 114.

travelers believe that the original designs often fell short of the genteel examples in England, but they remarked how often the southern planters, even the most wealthy and well known, allowed their residences to fall into disrepair. It was the physical representations of gentility that the English felt the American planter elite fell short of genteel standards. However, American planters did not limit their attempts to gentility strictly to material possessions, and the English travelers noticed this as well.

A gentleman's peers judged the degree of his inner-virtue by examining his education, the use of leisure time, availability to and presentation at social gatherings, as well as entertainment and sport. In all of these ways, the Americans tried to present themselves in a genteel manner. As the evidence from travelogues suggests, English travelers judged American gentility by examining these same qualities among the southern planter elite.

The degree of education present in the southern United States surprised English travelers, for the most part. While Thomas Cooper found education to be lacking in the European sense of the word, John Bernard and John Davis believed otherwise.[226] In fact, Bernard discovered "men of high intelligence and even refinement" among his company in Virginia.[227] Most of the older generation of planters had been educated in England and France. Latin, Greek, mathematics, handwriting and cyphering, and rhetoric were among the most important subjects studied by the planter elite, according to John Davis.[228] Even

[226] Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America*, 52.
[227] Bernard, *Retrospections of America*, 146.
[228] Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America*, 3.

in North and South Carolina, where planters found education to be less advanced than in Virginia, Bernard still found a love of books as well as a desire for polite information.[229]

Only one of the English travelers of this analysis made any comment on the possession and use of leisure time. John Ferdinand Smyth, in describing the daily schedule of the Virginian planter, found that, for the most part he did not utilize his leisure time appropriately. In fact, only four hours of sleep in the morning separated the daily schedule between the larger and middling planters' daily schedule. According to Smyth's depiction of the daily lifestyle of the Virginian planter, he did not spend his leisure time to fulfill the genteel requirements for inner-virtue.

Some southern planters excelled at social gatherings. Weld found that the southern planters that he came into contact with held biweekly assemblies for their fellow gentlemen; these assemblies usually included cards, dancing, and theater.[230] The community that Davis visited on the Ashley River clearly held socialization high among their list of activities.[231] Of the travelers presented in this analysis, only John Lambert disapproved of the quality of entertainment present in Charleston; he believed the entertainment to be lacking in quantity and disappointing in quality.[232]

At these social gatherings, John Bernard and Morris Birkbeck found the conversation of the American planters to be a nice relief. In fact, Bernard declared that on the plantations around Richmond and Norfolk, the gentlemen addressed their superiors in

[229] Bernard, *Retrospections of America*, 209.
[230] Weld, *Travels through the States*, 43-46.
[231] Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America*, 114.
[232] Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada, and the United States of America*, 2: 136-137, 139, 140.

a serious manner and were reserved with their peers, just as eighteenth-century English courtesy books and Lord Chesterfield had taught.[233] Birkbeck was also genuinely surprised by the ability of Virginian gentlemen to converse at the same level of intelligence and gentility as him.[234] As Bernard claimed, this practice began with the American planters' encounter with European mannerisms during their education in England and France, and continued through correspondence with acquaintances in these countries.[235]

Chief among the sports enjoyed by southern gentlemen was horse racing. Smyth and Bernard agreed, through their separate descriptions of the Williamsburg horse racing events, that this particular region rivaled the prestigious breeding and jockeying techniques at Newmarket in England.[236] While these two travelers held nothing but esteem for the American planter elite in replicating the best traits of horse racing, Isaac Weld and John Lambert provided a different opinion. Weld believed that the planters of Petersburg, Virginia were poor horsemen who often forgot to save enough grain from their harvest to feed the horses. He also claimed that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the best horses were still imported from England.[237] From these mixed reports, it is clear that in some regions, a genteel form of horse racing persisted while in others, the more refined practices were lacking.

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[233] Bernard, *Retrospections of America*, 146.
[234] Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America*, 11, 13, 14.
[235] Bernard, *Retrospections of America*, 146.
[236] Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America*, 21, 23; Bernard, *Retrospections of America*, 154.
[237] Weld, *Travels through the States*, 185.

John Bernard and John Davis were the only two to report on hunting in the southern United States. Both described the differences between hunting in the United States and the traditional hunting practices of England. Bernard commented that while the American way was different from the English, only the wealthiest of planters treated hunting as a sport, just like the nobility and gentry did in England.[238] Davis declared that by the time of his visit to the United States, hunting had become "the chief diversion of the Planters" although he was thoroughly unimpressed with the American alterations to English traditions.[239]

Through all of this, English travelers acknowledged one traditionally genteel characteristic that was the most developed in the southern planter culture – hospitality. In fact, the majority of the travelers remarked how pleasantly the southerners treated foreign visitors. But, by the early nineteenth century, this hospitality extended beyond class boundaries. Even the English travelers of this period recognized that hospitality was no longer a trait exclusive to the genteel classes of society. This meant that the planter elite of the South could not claim hospitality as a characteristic proving their gentility because, by definition, it was no longer a refined social act limited to one class.

While the southern planters of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries possessed some characteristics of gentility, they did not have the means to be genteel by traditional English standards. According to the English travelers of the period, there were three aspects of American society. First, the wealthy families did not have the heritage that English noble and gentry families had to provide an established and stable income.

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[238] Bernard, *Retrospections of America,* 154.
[239] Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America*, 102.

Instead, the southern elite's plantations were their means of wealth, which took time away from genteel activities – despite their best intentions. Second, the planter elite did not have availability (because of their location away from ports) to the material goods that English gentlemen relied on to portray their gentility. Finally, Americans had different priorities; they praised ownership of property over the rapid adoption of new European trends and fashions. Each of these criticisms mentioned by English travelers tap into the primary difference between England and the United States – English society was founded in aristocracy while the United States were egalitarian. Through these three issues (as raised by English travelers), the egalitarian society of the southern United States fundamentally rejected the aristocratic traditions that English gentility was based on. It is these facts that prevented the planter elite of the southern United States from matching English gentility in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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Scope and Method of Study: This work examines the degree that gentility existed among the American planter elite between 1776 and 1820. While historians have examined gentility from the American perspective, this work turns to contemporary English commentary, as presented in travelogues. According to the English tradition, there are several ways in which a person expressed gentility. Physical representations came in the form of ownership of refined goods and greatness of house. Inner-virtue also played a role in the determination of a man's gentility. In England, inner-virtue manifested itself through education, refined interactions at social gatherings, participation in gentlemanly sport, and hospitality toward visitors. As a result of the evidence provided by the travelogues, this work looks exclusively at English commentary concerning the American planter culture established Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina.

Findings and Conclusions: While English travelers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries found evidence of physical representations and inner-virtue in the southern United States, there were other qualifications essential to gentility that the southern planters did not possess. First, where the English gentry possessed an established and stable income, the southern planters were still tied to their plantations as the primary means of their wealth. Responsibilities to the plantation also took time and energy away from a genteel education, practice of refined mannerisms, and attendance at genteel social activities. Second, where refined goods were easier to acquire in England, the wealthiest families in the United States had to import refined goods from England and Europe; this required access to ports and enough money to support the high costs; many families could not meet these demands. Finally, Americans had different priorities than the English gentry; in England, the gentry followed trends and fashions set in Europe as a determination of social status whereas in the United States, gentlemen earned their social status through ownership of property. According to the evidence provided in English travelogues, it was through the lack of these qualifications that the southern planter elite could not be classified as genteel.

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